



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 15 May 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁵	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁶	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

CONTENTS

RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Political material	1721
BILLS	
Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024	1721
Introduction and first reading	1721
PETITIONS	
Jetty Road–Mornington Peninsula Freeway, Rosebud	1722
Portland District Health	1722
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	1722
BILLS	
Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024	1722
Council’s agreement	1722
Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024	1722
Assembly’s amendments	1722
National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024	1722
Council’s amendments	1722
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Adjournment	1723
Standing and sessional orders	1723
MEMBERS	
Member for Pakenham	1723
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Anzac Day	1724
Austin Hospital	1724
Road maintenance	1725
Women’s health	1725
Motor neurone disease	1725
Budget 2024–25	1725
Newport level crossing removals	1726
Motor neurone disease	1726
Budget 2024–25	1727
Ashley Gordon	1727
Kalkallo electorate sporting facilities	1727
Condolences	1728
St Helena Secondary College	1728
Budget 2024–25	1729
Anzac Day	1729
Budget 2024–25	1729
Waverley Helpmates	1730
Laurimar Primary School	1730
Melbourne Malayalee Association	1730
Diamond Valley Community Support	1730
Community safety	1731
Zimbabwean community	1731
Narre Warren North electorate sports clubs	1731
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1732
Standing and sessional orders	1732
BILLS	
Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024	1732
Statement of compatibility	1732
Second reading	1735
Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024	1737
Second reading	1737
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Suburban Rail Loop	1767
Ministers statements: motor neurone disease	1768
Economic policy	1769
Ministers statements: transport infrastructure	1770
School saving bonus	1771

CONTENTS

Ministers statements: community food relief	1771
Rental support	1772
Ministers statements: family violence	1773
Energy policy	1774
Ministers statements: business support.....	1775
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Constituency questions	1776
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Croydon electorate.....	1776
Greenvale electorate	1776
Euroa electorate	1777
Kororoit electorate.....	1777
Polwarth electorate	1777
Bellarine electorate	1777
Brunswick electorate.....	1778
Narre Warren North electorate.....	1778
Morwell electorate.....	1778
Glen Waverley electorate.....	1778
BILLS	
Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024	1779
Second reading.....	1779
National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024	1779
Council's amendments.....	1779
State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024	1779
Second reading.....	1779
Third reading.....	1801
Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024	1801
Second reading.....	1801
Third reading.....	1802
ADJOURNMENT	
Community safety	1802
Container deposit scheme	1802
Western Victoria fires	1803
Holmesglen youth foyer.....	1804
Eildon electorate health services	1804
Pinewood Primary School	1805
Solar for Apartments program.....	1805
Willum Warrain.....	1806
Euroa electorate health services	1806
Thomastown electorate sporting and recreation facilities	1807
Responses	1807

Wednesday 15 May 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Rulings from the Chair***Political material**

The SPEAKER (09:33): Members, thank you for assembling earlier today for the group photo. In a show of support for our colleague the member for Pakenham I am happy for members to wear their beanies in the chamber until the beginning of statements by members. After that time the house's normal rules will apply, and I would appreciate it if the beanies were removed.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, I would like to seek a ruling on a matter that occurred in the chamber last week. Last Tuesday you asked the member for Richmond to remove her keffiyeh scarf. I would like to seek a ruling as to whether that was for that particular point in time or whether in fact the keffiyeh is banned and not allowed to be worn in the chamber.

The SPEAKER: Political paraphernalia and badges are not allowed in the house. My ruling stands.

Ellen Sandell: On a further point of order, I would just like to clarify: members in this place often wear items of clothing to show support for various causes, all of which could arguably be seen as political. Others wear cultural or religious items such as jewellery which could also be aligned with political views. An MP today is wearing a yellow pin, which could be perceived by some as support for the Israeli military. Others are wearing rainbow badges.

The SPEAKER: Member for Melbourne, this is not the appropriate forum to raise these matters. If you seek clarification, I am happy to discuss this with you in my office.

*Bills***Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024***Introduction and first reading*

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:35): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Crime Statistics Act 2014, the Criminal Procedure Act 2009, the Defamation Act 2005, the Freedom of Information Act 1982, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, the Judicial Commission of Victoria Act 2016, the Local Government Act 2020, the Ombudsman Act 1973, the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014, the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012, the Public Interest Monitor Act 2011, the Racing Act 1958, the Spent Convictions Act 2021, the Surveillance Devices Act 1999, the Telecommunications (Interception) (State Provisions) Act 1988 and the Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011, to make consequential amendments to various acts following the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:36): I ask the minister for a brief – and I emphasise 'brief' – explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:36): I thank the honourable member for Malvern for his request. The bill will amend the Defamation Act 2005 to clarify the liability of digital intermediaries for the publication of defamatory third-party content and extends the defence of absolute privilege to matters published to police and relevant complaints-handling bodies. The bill will also include Victoria Police electronic signature, court data and integrity amendments.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

*Petitions***Jetty Road–Mornington Peninsula Freeway, Rosebud**

Sam GROTH (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 2474 signatures:

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support for an upgrade of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway between Jetty Road and Boneo Road in Rosebud. Residents have long called for a solution to the chronic congestion at the end of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, which is at its worst during the summer peak. This important project would reduce congestion, improve travel times and reliability, and improve safety for all road users.

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government to fund a crucial new freeway overpass at Jetty Road, Rosebud that would mean a quicker and safer commute for families right across the Mornington Peninsula.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Portland District Health

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) presented a petition bearing 738 signatures:

The petition of the Hon Dr Denis Napthine AO and the Residents of Portland draws to the attention of the House the ongoing closure of the Portland District Health Helipad which is a vital resource to ensure timely lifesaving treatment for the Portland community. It has been closed since December 2022.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria calls on the Victorian Government to undertake the necessary steps to ensure the immediate reopening of the Helipad at the Portland and District Health site.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

*Documents***Documents**

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order under s 17D granting a lease over Murtoa Caravan Park Reserve.

*Bills***Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:38): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024 without amendment.

Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024*Assembly's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:38): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the further amendment made by the Legislative Assembly to the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024.

National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024*Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:38): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

*Business of the house***Adjournment**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:39): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 28 May 2024.

Motion agreed to.

Standing and sessional orders

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today to allow the member for Pakenham to make a statement to the house immediately after formal business.

Motion agreed to.

*Members***Member for Pakenham**

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (09:40): I thank the house for allowing me to deliver my statement. As many of you know, I have faced a few challenges in my lifetime – a stroke at 36, a close political election campaign – and now I face my biggest challenge: motor neurone disease. Firstly, I would like to thank my family – my partner Matt, my children Sienna and Sage, Mum, Dad, Dragan and my sister Ceri and my nephews – who are facing this challenge alongside me, but also all of you for the kind words and gestures that many of you have given to me from all sides of this chamber and from the other place. If I focus on all that kindness, I get a bit emotional, so please bear with me.

I would like to acknowledge other people in this chamber who have a battle on their hands with illness, the member for Benambra, and also members who have lost loved ones to MND or other serious illness. In fact, anyone who has lost a loved one, my thoughts are with you too. I am not the only one facing the beast; there are over 2000 Australians and over 500 Victorians living with MND, and that is also a lot of friends and families who are impacted also. I have been privileged to interact with so many people and meet such inspiring individuals since I went public with this news. There is a big MND support family, and it brings us together. I also want to shout out to my friends Adena Savva and Matt Stickland. My beautiful community of the Pakenham district have also been very supportive, and I thank them for trusting that, despite me battling the beast, I will continue to be a voice for them here in Spring Street.

I had a choice: I could curl up and cry, which I did do for two days, or get out and do what I need to do. The legendary Neale Daniher says, ‘Don’t say; do!’ – except for me it was, ‘Stop crying and do!’ We are fortunate to have Neale Daniher and his family with us in Parliament today. As a family, they have done so much with raising the profile of MND. Not everyone completely understands that motor neurone disease is a condition that progressively damages parts of the nervous system and leads to muscle weakness, often with visible wasting and unfortunately with no current cure. It is a terminal disease. Neale Daniher, Pat Cunningham and the late Ian Davis founded FightMND 10 years ago, in 2014. Since then they have grown, raising the profile of the disease and raising millions and millions of dollars for research to find effective treatments and to ultimately find a cure. Various other supports are also given.

Not long after my public statement Neale reached out to me. Neale and his wife Jan invited Matt and me to their house for a chat. It was an open chat to open our eyes to what our journey ahead might look like, with tips and information that we are very, very grateful for. Then an invitation to join them at the FightMND launch of the 10th beanie – it was an incredible night, very emotional, but I am so grateful for that opportunity, especially for my kids so they could see that we are not alone. And a big

thankyou to CEO of FightMND Dr Fiona McIntosh for her support also. Thank you, Neale and the entire Daniher family, for opening your arms to not only me but so many.

I also want to talk about the work that MND Australia and MND Victoria do. I am honoured to have the CEO of MND Victoria Kate Johnson in Parliament today. Unfortunately my MND support coordinator David Cox is unwell and could not make it. On the first day of diagnosis I called MND Victoria and I cried; I did not know where to start. Joyce was there to hear me and to provide useful information and start my application for a support coordinator. A couple of weeks later David Cox came to our home. He listened to us for hours, and he explained everything that MND Victoria had to offer both me and my family. They are an incredible organisation who do a large range of things but predominantly help with the care of people living with MND from the beginning through to palliative care. MND Victoria provide mobility aids, equipment, counselling and so much more. I thank them and their team from the bottom of my heart. A huge thankyou to all the members and staff who purchased a beanie to support FightMND and who purchased a pin from MND Victoria, and a big thankyou to the Parliament, the Parliament team and you, Speaker, for allowing us to have a group photo in the chamber. Please encourage your friends and family to make a donation to both of these wonderful organisations if they are able to do so. They do such a wonderful job caring and supporting families with MND.

In closing, the disease has progressed in me to the point that my right arm is very weak, so for any of my parliamentary colleagues who see me peering at the cheese wheel in Parliament of an evening, please cut a piece for me.

Members applauded.

Members statements

Anzac Day

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:46): I rise today on the powerful services that were held across the Hawthorn electorate to commemorate this year's Anzac Day, 109 years on from the landings at Anzac Cove. These dawn services took place at the cenotaphs of Camberwell, Surrey Hills and Hawthorn in honour of our fallen. I thank the organisers at the Camberwell and Hawthorn RSLs as well as the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association. In the weeks leading up to Anzac Day, I attended services and events held by community groups across the Hawthorn electorate and further afield. I would like to make special mention of the Wattle Park Anzac service that was held on Sunday 21 April. We are all grateful and indebted to those men and women in our armed forces who put themselves in harm's way, many who sadly paid the ultimate price to safeguard our democratic freedoms. Can I place on record our ongoing gratitude for those men and women who continue to serve in our name in various parts of the world in the cause of peace and democracy and the promise of a brighter future for many who still struggle to achieve their own freedoms. Commemorating the fallen as we do each year is an important way for all of us to reflect on our nation's proud history and the sacrifices made by those who came before us. Lest we forget.

Austin Hospital

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:48): I am pleased to inform the house that on Sunday we came together at the Austin Hospital with the Premier and also with the Minister for Health to announce a \$275 million revamp, upgrade and expansion of the emergency department at the Austin Hospital. The current emergency department treats some 90,000 presentations a year. It was built to treat some 45,000, and this new investment of \$275 million, which is delivering on an election commitment from the 2022 election, will see it able to cater for an additional 30,000 presentations on top of that 90,000 that are being treated today.

It was the Bracks Labor government that built two hospitals on one site, the Austin and Mercy hospitals, and not only made that investment, but we also saw the development of the Olivia Newton-

John Cancer Wellness and Research Centre right alongside Austin Health under the Brumby government. It is great that here under the Allan Labor government we will see this \$275 million expansion of the emergency department at Austin Health.

I want to thank the team at Austin Health for the great work that they provide in our community. It was those opposite under Premier Kennett who sought to privatise and sell the Austin Hospital and it was at that time that they lost the seat of Ivanhoe, and they have never regained it, because the people of Ivanhoe have never forgiven them and they never forget. It is always Labor governments that invest in our Austin Hospital.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:49): Last week's budget showed that Labor cannot manage money, and it is our roads across the state that are suffering as a result. Buried in the performance measures is clear data showing just how bad the lack of maintenance spending on roads has got. The total area of roads resurfaced or rehabilitated fell from 10 million square metres to just 1 million, and in regional Victoria from 9 million to a paltry 343,000. That is a reduction of 96 per cent. It confirms what we have heard from road builders and spray seal contractors: that there were no resurfacing contracts issued by the government last year for the first time in at least 40 years. That just leaves a ticking time bomb of roads maintenance that will explode as even worse road conditions in coming years. This was the consequence of the lowest road maintenance budget in 10 years, at just \$441 million, a 45 per cent cut since 2020. By contrast, the government's Big Build program continues to blow out in cost to a total of \$40 billion. The North East Link blowout last year of \$10 billion alone highlights the neglect of our roads, a \$10 billion cost overrun on one single project versus \$441 million to fix the whole state's roads. The result is more potholes, rough roads and damage to Victorians' vehicles. There was a 414 per cent increase in damage claims last year. Victorians are regularly asking: why does my car have to be roadworthy when the roads are not carworthy? Labor cannot manage money, and our roads are a disgrace as a result.

Women's health

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:51): Recently, the member for Bellarine, the member for Lara and I held a women's pain forum in Geelong to encourage women and girls to submit to the Victorian women's pain inquiry. The Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, the member for Northcote, addressed over 120 women in Geelong, providing details about the inquiry and how to make a submission. A panel of local women each shared their experiences with pain. I do want to thank Julie Spec, Brigitte Stone, Kat Stanley, Marsha Uppill, Luba Pryslak and Kylie Clarke for their contributions to the forum. The forum was a really deep talking and listening event for women in Geelong, who very much appreciated it. In fact it was sold out, and we had a waiting list on that. I think that is an indication of how important this inquiry is to women in my community and, I am sure, in communities right across this state.

Motor neurone disease

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:52): I do want to give a huge thanks to the member for Pakenham for bringing her issue to this chamber today and raising awareness about MND and the importance of all of us gathering around her but also all those that are suffering with this disease. I look forward to participating in the Big Freeze in Geelong. I do not know if I am going to go into the ice yet, but I am considering it.

Budget 2024–25

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:52): The recent state budget shows that the state Labor government simply cannot manage money, with all the cuts to programs, the axing of major projects and debt that will continue to rise, from \$137 billion to \$189 billion. These figures are mind-boggling. To simplify it, they mean the state government needs to spend \$25 million per day to pay the interest bill on that debt.

My electorate of Rowville once again missed out on funding for any road projects. In January this year we had a fatality in Wellington Road. We pleaded to make sure that this road was upgraded to reduce the speed and force trucks to only travel in the left lane, and for speed and red-light cameras to be put up with appropriate signage, warning motorists of a camera ahead. Instead, we received a replacement traffic light three months after the incident.

Carrington Primary School in Knoxville at the last election was promised \$10 million for a major upgrade. The project has now been axed, and another school community has been misled by this Labor government. Rowville and Scoresby secondary schools are great schools, like our surrounding primary schools, and all desperately need funds for major upgrades. Once again, funding for these schools has been overlooked.

Just when I thought the state government could not get any worse, and the state budget, I read that valuable cancer research has been cut by 75 per cent. How very stupid is that.

Newport level crossing removals

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:54): I would like to congratulate the members of the Keep Champion Road Open group for engaging constructively and collaboratively to help get the best outcomes for our community. Over the past year I have had many conversations with Gill and Bea. I have arranged many meetings and tabled their petition, and just last week I managed to secure a meeting with a number of different organisations to understand some of the constraints and challenges associated with level crossings at Maddox and Champion roads. I would like to thank everyone who attended. It was a great opportunity to hear from AusNet about high-pressure transmission gas pipes, Metro Trains, VicTrack, Bike Network and members of the stakeholder liaison group. I think we learned a lot from the engagement.

However, what is extremely disappointing is the way that Hobsons Bay City Council have engaged with the whole process, because although council have been encouraged to engage, they really had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the table to participate. And it is unfortunate – council has been conducting traffic surveys in the area and they have received a TAC grant for safety improvements on Maddox Road, and this was an opportunity for them to present this information and engage constructively. Instead council claim they have not been engaged, and I know this is simply not true. In June last year the Level Crossing Removal Project met with the CEO and council officers to start the engagement. Then at the request of council, a councillor briefing session was kicked down the road until the end of November. Following that there have been fortnightly meetings between LXR and council. I will continue to advocate for the best outcomes for my community, but I will do it in a respectful, collaborative way.

Motor neurone disease

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:55): Can I first start by thanking the member for Pakenham for sharing her story here today. Many in the room may not know that I knew the member for Pakenham prior to coming into Parliament. Our first experience of catching up was when she was a volunteer as a firefighter out in Beaconsfield. Many would have known we had a political battle going at the time with the CFA, and I went out quite regularly and bagged the then Premier Daniel Andrews in that room and had my say. And then one day I walked in here and saw Emma, and she came up, gave me a kiss and I turned around and said ‘How are you going?’ and she said ‘Great.’ I said ‘What are you doing in the Parliament?’ and she said ‘I work for Daniel Andrews.’ I was not aware of that whilst I was bagging Daniel Andrews in that room, but she forgave me for everything I did.

But to hear her story now is something obviously that hits many people in Victoria, and FightMND is an organisation that we know does so much. We can do a small part in our communities. I note the member for Geelong said she may or may not go down the slide. I will go down the slide. I have been dared to go down as Donald Trump, but it will not happen – just letting everyone know. But I will be

going down the slide at the Beaconsfield big slide this year on 6 June, and I invite the community to come along. Probably this year more than ever with the 10 years and obviously with Neale Daniher doing so much over his time with what we have done with MND, I invite everyone out in the Casey and Cardinia community to come along on 6 June and join us at that slide and raise as much money as possible. I will get our other Labor members down there, and maybe we can go down as a Liberal and Labor combination on that slide.

Budget 2024–25

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:57): I rise today to speak on how the Allan Labor government's investments in the budget handed down last week will make a real difference across communities in Mill Park, South Morang, Epping and Wollert. It was wonderful to join with the members for Bundoora, Yan Yean and Thomastown and Northern Health representatives last Friday to welcome the state government's investment of \$812.5 million for the redevelopment of the Northern Hospital. The redevelopment includes a new emergency department, an alcohol and other drugs hub, a dedicated acute behaviour treatment space and a dedicated children's emergency department, plus new inpatient beds. These upgrades will take the number of treatment spaces for emergency patients to almost 200.

Earlier on Friday, that same day, I was delighted to visit Wollert Secondary College with the member for Thomastown and meet with acting principal Neil Baillie to discuss the \$36.166 million investment in the school. This investment will deliver a brand new arts, technology and science building, an administration building, a new learning neighbourhood as well as landscaping works. For a rapidly growing school in Melbourne's northern suburbs this investment will allow students to have access to state-of-the-art facilities, and the year 8 students I spoke with cannot wait to enjoy the benefits.

Later that evening I attended Mill Park Secondary College's arts festival opening night, located in the school's recently finished \$11.6 million 400-seat performing arts centre, which was funded also by the Victorian government. It was wonderful to speak to families about the government's \$400 school saving bonus, which will give great cost-of-living relief to every family who has a child attending the school next year.

Ashley Gordon

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:58): The horrific and tragic death of Dr Ashley Gordon earlier this year sent shockwaves through the Box Hill community where he was a dedicated and passionate doctor and through my community in the Latrobe Valley where Dr Gordon was raised and where his family lives. The far-reaching impact Dr Gordon had on so many lives was clear at his funeral, where nearly 1000 people packed Kernot Hall in Morwell.

A few weeks ago I had the great honour of meeting Dr Gordon's family. Ash, as he was affectionately known, was a much-loved son, brother, uncle and friend. His senseless death has left the Gordon family reeling, and now they are determined to lobby for change in his name. The Gordon family has asked me to sponsor a petition calling on the state government to take three actions: amend legislation to afford police greater stop and search powers, reinstate section 30B of the Bail Act 1977 and cancel plans to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14. The Gordon family met with the Attorney-General recently, but they felt they were afforded only lip service and platitudes. They did not feel heard. That is why it is my great honour to be sponsoring this petition on behalf of the Gordon family to officially call on the state government to use their powers to effect very real and lasting change in Ashley's name.

Kalkallo electorate sporting facilities

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:00): There has been terrific news across the Kalkallo electorate for grassroots sport over the past few weeks, with exciting announcements that will make a meaningful

difference and help improve opportunities for participation. As part of the latest round of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, lighting will be installed at Aston Reserve standalone soccer pitch. This announcement has been hugely welcomed by Craigieburn City Football Club, which boasts a massive 67 teams this year. I would like to thank Paul and Joanne Dugo, who have been tireless advocates for this upgrade and on behalf of Craigieburn City generally.

But it is not just soccer that is benefiting from this government's investment; the recent state budget also provided a boost for the Craigieburn tennis courts, with funding for lighting that will enable more court time for local residents. This upgrade is great news for members of the longstanding Craigieburn Tennis Club, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the club on celebrating its 50th birthday this year. What a terrific milestone.

Finally, I recently had the opportunity to visit the Craigieburn Sports Stadium upgrade. Works on stage 1 are almost complete, including the construction of three new multisport courts for basketball, netball and badminton. Backed by a \$5 million contribution from the Allan Labor government and delivered in partnership with Hume City Council, this massive upgrade is incredibly important for the Craigieburn Netball Association, the Craigieburn Ladies Badminton Club and of course the mighty Craigieburn Eagles Basketball Association. Grassroots sport is at the heart of Melbourne's growing outer north, and I am thrilled this government is continuing to deliver important investments and outcomes.

Condolences

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:01): I rise on three condolences. Mount Martha's Elaine Walters OAM died last Thursday. She was a trailblazing author and educator on drug use hazards and prevention and worked with affected families. She studied a Churchill fellowship and advocated globally. She wrote many books, including *Street Drugs: The New Addiction Industry*, which I helped launch last year.

Hans Brunner died on Anzac Day, one day off 96. I went to his Mornington funeral last Thursday. He pioneered animal hair analysis, helping to exonerate Lindy Chamberlain by proving dingo hair presence. He was a man with a golden voice with Edelwyss Yodel Choir, a Swiss Club of Victoria member, played table tennis past 90 and was the 2014 Environmentalist of the Year.

Lastly, my grandpa Bob McIntosh died on Mother's Day aged 96. He farmed wheat, sheep and barley at Ellam, near Jeparit, next to his cousin Noel McIntosh, who was grandpa to Tom McIntosh MP. Grandpa later lived and worked in Wangaratta before retiring up to Kingscliff. He will be greatly missed by my grandma Verna, his six children, including my mum Debbie, and all his grandkids, great-grandkids, family and friends.

St Helena Secondary College

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (10:02): Congratulations to St Helena Secondary College for their fantastic performance of *Our Town*. This terrific school has so many talented and creative actors who are an absolute joy to watch: Siena Laidler, Kobus Victor, Mia Elisher, Dominic Lavery, Joshua Thompson-Bennets, Hannah Smith, Massimo Lavery, Esmare Victor, Rami Eletr, Madison Bethune, Morgan Fraser, Emily Davis, Sophie Hardinham, Emily Russell, Charlotte McFarlane, Nikki Shetye, Isaac Thompson, Isabella Bannister, Angus O'Loughlin, Amy Stone, Mayella Webb, Tiernan Di Berardino, Molly Mills and Grace Brockett. The junior ensemble comprised Jessica Argiropoulos, Asher Ashraf, Kayla Broomfield, Sienna Croaker, Zoe Di Dio, Priya Ellis Smith, Abigail Johnstone, Ravi King, Chelsea King, Melody O'Keeffe, Lily O'Loughlin, Bella Peters, Caitlin Pollock, Meimuna Sha and Olivia Wood. It was directed by Amanda Egglestone, with the support of assistant director Jack Collins, producer Laura Zinghini, technical design Thomas Gerasimidis, vocal coach Lynne Bartlett and a technical crew of Xavier Hawker, Elliot Dixon, Giselle Hick, Zoe Maslin, Lincoln Novak, Molly Odgers, Anya Watkinson and Jay Taylor.

It was a fantastic performance and a testament to our brilliant state schools. Our state schools do so much work. They support their kids so incredibly well, and it was wonderful to see the network that was around our St Helena students and their incredible performances – mature, confident performances that were so beautifully made. Congratulations, St Helena, on a fantastic production.

Budget 2024–25

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (10:04): I have been pleased to advocate on behalf of Stonnington Community Assist, a volunteer-led organisation in the Pahran electorate that have now been allocated funding in this year's state budget – much-needed funds to enable them to continue and expand the important work that they do providing vital support and material aid like food to the most in need in our community. Their services have been in increasingly high demand due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Disappointingly, however, there was no funding allocated in the budget to St Kilda Primary School and their much-needed community hub. The school lacks an indoor space large enough for the whole school to congregate and for assemblies, performances and community activities. This limits the school's ability to provide physical education, wellbeing programs and after-school care. Again, there was no money to implement the second entrance needed at Windsor station, which is needed to improve access and complete the Windsor Siding master plan that council has been undertaking; no funding for safe and separated bike lanes on Chapel Street north, despite this being one of Melbourne's most dangerous cycling routes; and no funding for the relocation of the Port Phillip and Malvern SES units, despite existing facilities being crowded and inaccessible, resulting in delays or the units being ill equipped to respond to emergencies. I will continue to fight for these organisations so our community gets the funding that it needs.

Anzac Day

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (10:05): Türkiye and Australia have a special bond forged through their shared experience on the shores of Gallipoli. I was proud to lead a parliamentary delegation this year to attend the Anzac Day dawn service at Çanakkale. Members from across parliaments joined to attend memorial services honouring the fallen held by the Australian, Turkish and New Zealand armed forces. The Anzac Day dawn service and the Lone Pine service hold a unique place in Australia's wartime history, a shared place etched into the memory of our country. We also attended Atatürk's mausoleum to pay our respects to the founding father of Türkiye, a friend of the Johnnies and Mehments. Our delegation was honoured to represent our local communities as the sun rose over the cliffs of Anzac Cove and pay tribute and remember and never forget.

I would like to acknowledge the support provided by the Turkish government, especially by the Turkish ambassador Ufuk Gezer and consul general Doğan Işık. I would also like to thank the Australian ambassador Miles Armitage for hosting our delegation. Of course we were absolutely honoured to attend and meet members of Parliament at the Turkish general assembly. I would like to thank His Excellency Halil Eldemir, president of the Türkiye and Australian parliamentary friendship group, and His Excellency Bekir Bozdağ, the Deputy Speaker of the assembly, for their time and hospitality; and finally Turkish Airlines chairman Ahmet Bolat for his support and the governor of Gallipoli İlhami Aktaş and the director of Gallipoli İsmail Kaşdemir.

Budget 2024–25

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:07): I rise to update the house on some of the outcomes that were in the budget papers for the seat of Sydenham. The Allan Labor government is continuing to invest and build upon our state education system. Plumpton primary school will receive a share of the \$948 million, as part of the new school's construction being delivered by 2026. Many local residents will receive assistance from Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre, which I am proud to say with this budget will continue to deliver crucial services and funding. The budget also supports the

continuation of the centre's family violence program, providing vital legal services to victims and survivors of family violence. We are also supporting the Caroline Chisholm Society with \$110,000 to provide specialist homelessness services for women and children across the west. Their assistance is absolutely crucial in finding short- and long-term housing options, advocacy and support for applications for private and social housing. Women deserve to live safely and without fear, and violence against women is not just a women's issue, it is a men's issue. It is everyone's issue, and Australians made that clear three weeks ago as they marched through the streets of Melbourne and all the other major cities. Victoria has worked hard on this issue and will continue to.

Waverley Helpmates

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:08): It was a delight last week to visit the fantastic people down at Waverley Helpmates in Ashwood. Waverley Helpmates are a business that has been going for over 30 years, providing employment for people with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities. The most important thing about it is that it is employment. It is not supported employment as such, it employment; it is jobs. They will do your gardening and they will do some cleaning, and there is one woman there who I met who is doing ironing, which frankly I probably need more days than not. This group have been going for 30 years. I just want to give a very special shout-out to all of the gang down there. A big thanks to Marian, Rohan, Chris, Nicole, Mandy and Ben for showing us around. It just shows that when we talk about people who are living with a disability, we really need to focus on their ability. There was a young woman Emily who came into my office a number of years ago to advocate for some changes. She has an intellectual disability, and we had a great conversation not about the things that challenge her life but the things that she can do. Employers should really open their eyes to the ability of these people who are ready to work. Everyone deserves the dignity of work, and I think the more we can do to have everyone in a job the better we are.

Laurimar Primary School

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:10): 'If a child can't learn the way we teach, we should teach the way they learn.' That saying is proudly displayed on the window at Laurimar Primary School, and I was there last week with Nikki Elliott, who leads the inclusion team. What a fantastic team they have there of over 30 education support workers running the strive program, providing language programs and social skills programs for the students of Laurimar Primary School. They are absolutely setting the pace for what schools can be, and with the government's disability inclusion program rolling out we know that they will only get stronger. So a very big congratulations to Nikki and the team there for what they are doing.

Melbourne Malayalee Association

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:11): On Sunday night I was very happy to join the Melbourne Malayalee Association for their dinner night. They were celebrating International Nurses Day and Mother's Day. We had a fantastic time, and a big congratulations to the executive – to Subin, Jamuna, Noby, Honey Jacob and Rachman – and of course to former executives Tom Joseph and Alex Joseph. It was a fantastic evening celebrating mothers and nurses in our community.

Diamond Valley Community Support

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:11): I rise to highlight the incredible work of Diamond Valley Community Support, which is based in my electorate in Greensborough. This wonderful organisation provides a range of services such as emergency relief for things like food and other essential items; the KidsAssist scheme, which helps with education costs for families in financial hardship; the food collective, providing food hampers and financial counselling; and tax help for low-income earners. They coordinate Christmas gifts each year for kids who would otherwise miss out. They run a volunteers hub to connect prospective volunteers with organisations looking for volunteers, and they connect people to other services. Each year Diamond Valley Community Support provide assistance to around

9000 people, predominantly from the Banyule and Nillumbik areas. While Diamond Valley Community Support does receive funding through government service agreements and grants, the majority of its income is self-generated through the operation of the popular market at La Trobe University car parks every Sunday and monthly markets at Macleod and Hurstbridge. They also run successful op shops at Diamond Creek and Macleod. An organisation providing this level of support obviously has a limited number of paid staff, but it is powered by more than 100 locals who volunteer to put back into their local community. They give approximately 19,000 volunteer hours every year. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the team at Diamond Valley Community Support and thank them for the incredible work that they do in my local community.

Community safety

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:13): The right to a peaceful protest is a fundamental tenet of our democracy, especially on our university campuses. Universities are places where critical thinking, tolerance of difference and constructive debate should flourish and where every student should feel safe to study regardless of their religious or cultural identity. But the growing antisemitism on our university campuses is achieving exactly the opposite effect. Far from being the peaceful vigils opposing the actions of a foreign government that some in this chamber would have us believe, these protests have been used to vilify Jews simply for supporting Israel's right to exist. Demands for globalised intifada, support for Hamas, Nazi salutes and calls for the destruction of the state of Israel, as well as slurs such as 'Eff off Zionist scum' and 'Zionists are not welcome', cannot be dismissed as merely differences of political opinion. We would not accept this behaviour targeting any other cultural or ethnic group, and we cannot accept this targeting of the Jewish community. Every day Jewish students are threatened with intimidation, harassment and the endorsement of terror organisations. Jewish students are being made to feel unsafe walking on campuses and attending their university classes. In response many Jewish students have felt the need to remove any sign of their Jewishness for fear of being targeted, and some no longer feel safe to attend classes in person. Universities have a responsibility to ensure dangerous extremism and hate are not being tolerated on their campuses, including from non-student actors who are pursuing their own political agendas. We all hope to see a swift and peaceful resolution to the war that has tragically gone on too long, but I implore our universities to stipulate, implement and enforce clear policies that prohibit hate speech.

Zimbabwean community

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:14): Last Saturday I was fortunate to visit the Zimbabwean community language school situated in Cranbourne East. It is an initiative that has played a significant role in keeping Zimbabwean children connected to their rich culture. The Zimbabwean community works tirelessly in many essential industries, and I particularly see a great number of clinicians in my community represented in the Zimbabwean heritage community.

Last weekend I was particularly honoured to have a lesson in Zimbabwean, and I want to thank the teachers, who were also the students on the day. I would like to acknowledge Shamiso, Mutsa, Shumirai, Maita, Ariya, Ruvarashe, Aiden, Kundai, Tyrell, Hailey, Megan, Alicia, Tiana and Stacia. They were terrific teachers as students, as were Robert, Joshua, Charlotte, Zara, Jayden and Christian, who were also part of the leaders. I would like to particularly thank the adult teachers – Ravai, Katra, Shelter and Muvini – who taught me various Zimbabwean phrases. The Zimbabwean diaspora is strong. The children of Zimbabwean heritage are a great joy to the community, and I am grateful to have them as friends.

Narre Warren North electorate sports clubs

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:16): I am honoured to get up and speak today and talk to you about a very big sport that is happening in my electorate; some would call it football – I, as an AFL supporter, would call it soccer. It is absolutely flourishing in Narre Warren North. I recently went and saw my Casey Panthers versus Berwick. I unfortunately did have to hand the cup over to Berwick. They did win, which was very, very difficult for me, but – *(Time expired)*

Business of the house**Notices of motion**

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:16): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1, government business, today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Standing and sessional orders

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:17): I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow only members who did not speak on the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 to speak on the motion to take note of the 2024–25 budget papers.

Motion agreed to.

Bills**Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024*****Statement of compatibility***

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:18): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the *Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Act 1985* (VIFM Act) to establish the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) as a public sector entity that provides high-quality forensic and human tissue services, teaching and training in the field of forensic services, and undertakes and supports research. In 2023, the Government conducted a review of the VIFM Act to ensure that VIFM remains well positioned to continue to provide best-practice services. The Bill addresses the findings of the review.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the following human rights:

- privacy and reputation (section 13)
- freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 14)
- cultural rights of Aboriginal communities (section 19)
- protection of families and children (section 17)
- right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

The right to privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with, and not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An interference with the right to privacy and reputation does not amount to a limitation on that right if it is lawful and not arbitrary. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed.

The Bill authorises VIFM to use any information it holds about an individual when conducting teaching and training, for the purposes of conducting its own research, or to support other entities' research or policy

development where this aligns with VIFM's objects. This may include information obtained, for example, during forensic medical investigations or clinical forensic medical examinations.

To safeguard the right to privacy, VIFM will only be authorised to use information in its research, or to disclose information to other entities, if doing so is not likely to prejudice a coronial investigation, criminal investigation, or a criminal proceeding. Before VIFM uses or discloses information for these purposes, if the information relates to a coronial investigation, VIFM will be required to notify the State Coroner of the proposed use or disclosure. Similarly, if the information relates to a criminal investigation or criminal proceeding, VIFM must notify the Chief Commissioner of Police. The Bill requires VIFM to provide the State Coroner and/or the Chief Commissioner with 21 days to provide advice about whether they reasonably consider that the use or disclosure of information is likely to prejudice an investigation or proceeding, and VIFM must have regard to any advice received. In addition to these requirements, if VIFM is seeking to disclose information to another entity, VIFM must enter into a written agreement with the entity it is sharing the information with to limit the other entity's use of the information to the purposes specified in the agreement, and require that these purposes be consistent with VIFM's objects as established by the Bill. The agreement must also provide that the entity's use of the information must not likely prejudice any coronial or criminal investigation or any criminal proceeding that has been or may be commenced.

Further, the Bill does not limit the application of the *Health Records Act 2001*, *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, *Victorian Data Sharing Act 2017* or other relevant legislation, which will continue to apply.

For these reasons, I consider that any interference with privacy is both lawful and not arbitrary, and therefore does not limit the right.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief

Section 14 of the Charter provides that a person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. This includes the ability to have or adopt a belief and the freedom to demonstrate that person's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, whether that be individually or as part of a community, in public or in private.

The Bill's principles promote this right, by providing that in performing a function or exercising a power, a person should have regard, as far as possible in the circumstances, to the cultural beliefs of persons affected by events to which VIFM's work relates, and the diverse cultural needs of Aboriginal communities, including the importance of self-determination for Aboriginal people, and their connection to culture, family community and Country.

The inclusion of the phrase 'as far as possible in the circumstances' recognises that in delivering its services, VIFM may not always be able to take into account a person's cultural beliefs, nor is this always appropriate, for example, where a person claims that a roadside toxicology test should not be conducted due to their cultural beliefs. For this reason, I consider that the Bill does not limit this right.

The protection of families and children

Section 17(1) of the Charter provides that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the State. Section 17(2) provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as in the child's best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child. Despite the Charter not defining the term 'family', the term is given a broad interpretation to reflect the diversity of families living in Victoria, as raised in the Charter's explanatory memorandum.

The Bill promotes the protection of families and children. It provides that in performing a function or exercising a power, a person should have regard, as far as possible in the circumstances, to the importance of recognising the significant nature of the events to which the Institute's services relate and the need to be sensitive and responsive to persons affected by those events. This principle promotes the protection of families and children by recognising the sensitive nature of the work VIFM conducts and the need to be responsive to persons affected, including family members.

The Bill provides that one of VIFM's functions is to investigate, assess and initiate responses in respect of the health of a parent, or the health and safety of a living sibling, of a deceased child whose death is a reviewable death. In performing this function, VIFM will have the power to consult families of deceased children and other persons, including health service providers, to assess whether a family requires health and support services. VIFM will also have the power to refer the family of the deceased child to health and support services. These functions and powers promote the protection of families and children, as the communication of any discoveries relating to genetic diseases, for example, would protect the wellbeing of living siblings and/or parents of the deceased child.

The Bill also authorises VIFM to assess whether a report under section 183 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* should be made in relation to any living siblings of a deceased child, make such a report and advise the State Coroner that a report has been made. These powers ensure VIFM can comply with its

obligations to report to a 'protective intervener' if VIFM considers on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection.

Cultural rights

Section 19(1) of the Charter provides that all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial, or linguistic background must not be denied the right, in community with others of the same background, to enjoy their culture, to declare and practise their religion, and to use their language.

Section 19(2) extends this protection by recognising the distinct cultural rights held by Aboriginal people. This includes not being denied the right to right to enjoy their identity and culture, the right to maintain language and kinship ties, and the right to maintain their spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land, waters and other resources which they have a connection under traditional laws and customs.

The Bill promotes cultural rights by providing that in performing a function or exercising a power, a person should have regard, as far as possible in the circumstances, to respecting the cultural beliefs of persons affected by the events to which the Institute's services relate, and to recognising the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities, including the importance of self-determination and connection to culture, family, community and Country.

The right to a fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair and public hearing. A fair hearing includes a right of unimpeded access to courts, an expeditious hearing, rights to legal advice and representation, and the privilege against self-incrimination. The right to a public hearing originates from the principle of open justice, to allow for public scrutiny of courts and tribunals, maintaining impartiality, and safeguarding against abuses of power.

The Bill authorises VIFM to use information during teaching and training, use information for its own research, and disclose information to another entity in certain circumstances. Some of the information VIFM may seek to use or disclose will relate to coronial or criminal investigations, or criminal proceedings.

The Bill's safeguards around information use and disclosure limit any potential impact on the right to a fair hearing. The Bill provides that VIFM may only use information for its own research, or disclose information to another entity for the purposes of research or policy development, if such use or disclosure is not likely to prejudice a coronial investigation, criminal investigation, or criminal proceeding that has been or may be commenced. Where VIFM proposes to use or disclose information related to a coronial investigation, VIFM must notify the State Coroner of the proposed use or disclosure. Similarly, where VIFM proposes to use or disclose information related to a criminal investigation or criminal proceeding, the Bill requires VIFM to notify the Chief Commissioner of Police of the proposed use or disclosure.

VIFM must allow the State Coroner and/or the Chief Commissioner 21 days to advise VIFM if they reasonably consider that the proposed use or disclosure is likely to prejudice a coronial investigation, criminal investigation or criminal proceeding. When determining whether the use or disclosure is likely to prejudice an investigation or proceeding, VIFM must have regard to any such advice.

In addition, if VIFM is seeking to disclose information to another entity, the Bill requires VIFM to enter into an agreement with the other entity, which limits the entity's use of the information to the purposes specified in the agreement, and requires that these purposes be consistent with VIFM's objects as established by the Bill. The agreement must also provide that the entity's use of the information must not likely prejudice any coronial or criminal investigation or any criminal proceeding that has been or may be commenced.

Rights in criminal proceedings

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, according to law.

As outlined above, the Bill establishes stringent safeguards around VIFM's information use and disclosure. Further, VIFM is subject to Victoria's information privacy framework. These safeguards minimise any risk of prejudice to a criminal investigation, or a criminal proceeding that has been or may be commenced, thereby protecting rights in criminal proceedings.

The Hon Anthony Carbines MP – Minister for Police

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:18): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Bill 2024 (the Bill) replaces the *Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Act 1985* (VIFM Act) as the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine's (VIFM's) enabling legislation. The Bill will support VIFM to maintain its status as a world-leading forensic medical institution.

In 2021, VIFM was provided \$93.1 million to build its capability and essential service delivery, including the addition of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) capability, lab equipment, infrastructure improvements, and new case management systems.

In 2023, the government granted VIFM \$19.47 million to transition to a new clinical forensic medicine (CFM) service delivery model that meets victim-survivor needs and expectations and ensures a sustainable and efficient service. Government also conducted a review of the VIFM Act to ensure it remains well positioned to continue to provide best-practice forensic services.

The Bill implements key findings from the review and is the final plank of reform for this vital service.

VIFM was established in legislation in 1985 to provide forensic pathology and scientific services to the State Coroner and Victorian justice system. Since VIFM's establishment, significant scientific and medical advancements have shaped and grown the services VIFM provides to the community. Today, VIFM is a world class forensic medical institute that supports coronial, criminal, and other legal processes. VIFM oversees the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria and engages in teaching and research to improve public health and safety.

I would like to highlight some of VIFM's significant achievements, which so often go under the radar. The diversity of these services reflects the breadth of expertise at VIFM, which we are lucky to have representing Victoria as the knowledge state.

In addition to its work for the Victorian Coroners Court and Victoria Police, VIFM is partnering with the Australian Sports Brain Bank to investigate chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, through post-mortem examination of people who have participated in sports with risks of repetitive head injury. It is also undertaking research into technology facilitated sexual assault, to help us better protect the community from this new means of offending.

Not to be limited to work of great benefit to this state, VIFM is also engaged nationally and internationally. It has recently been directly involved in capability building in death investigation and mortuary services in Bhutan, and for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Ukraine, Lebanon, and Armenia, and provided expert evidence for the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes for the New South Wales parliament. VIFM also coordinates national and international disaster victim identification forensic medical team deployments for the Federal Government.

Key features of the Bill include the introduction of principles to guide VIFM's work, a new governance structure, clarification of VIFM's objects and functions, and an information sharing framework.

The new legislation will commence no later than 1 July 2025, giving VIFM around 12 months after this bill's passage to prepare for the transition to its new structure.

The Bill establishes overarching principles to guide the exercise of functions and powers

The Bill introduces principles that aim to guide VIFM in a people-centred approach to service delivery, commitment to excellence in clinical and research governance, and to improving public health while serving the justice system. Importantly, the principles require a person to have regard, as far as possible in the circumstances, to respecting the cultural beliefs of those affected by the events to which the Institute's services relate, and recognising the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities, including the importance of self-determination and connection to culture, family, community and Country. It also requires regard to the significant nature of the events to which the Institute's services relate and the need to be sensitive and responsive to persons affected by those events. These principles highlight that although VIFM's work is focused on serving the justice system, it often engages with people who have experienced challenging events, and responding respectfully is a part of VIFM's ethos.

The Bill introduces a new governance structure

The Bill establishes a new governance structure for VIFM, which is designed to meet best practice standards for public entities. Key reforms in this structure include moving to a skills-based governing board and introducing two key leadership roles: a Chief Executive Officer and a Director of Forensic Medicine. The Bill enables concurrent occupation of both the Chief Executive Officer role and Director of Forensic Medicine, to maintain flexibility for the Board in determining VIFM's leadership. The move to a skills-based board reflects contemporary entity governance structures, but also incorporates the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland that it is necessary to preserve forensic medical and scientific expertise in the leadership of forensic entities to ensure organisational decisions do not impact the integrity of forensic services.

The Bill requires the Board to establish a stakeholder advisory group to assist in its decision-making and performance of its functions. The establishment of a stakeholder advisory group reflects the transition from the current representative VIFM Council and will ensure that key stakeholders relevant to the principles, objects and functions of the Bill can advise VIFM's Board.

The Bill clarifies VIFM's objects, functions, and powers

The Bill streamlines VIFM's statutory objects, functions, and powers to reflect its growth in service delivery over time. Since its establishment, VIFM has grown significantly and now provides forensic medical and scientific services on a much larger scale. VIFM also provides related training and research to its staff, universities, public agencies, including Victoria Police and the Coroners Court, and private entities. The Bill reflects VIFM's growth by clearly describing VIFM's objects, functions, and powers to better reflect the Institute's responsibilities and priorities.

The Bill outlines several objects that create a framework within which VIFM will deliver its functions. The objects are drafted to allow for the evolution of VIFM's services over time. They are intended to be flexible enough to support VIFM in expanding its scope of services, keeping pace with scientific and medical advancements while also making sure VIFM's services align with government service priorities and expectations. The Bill does not remove any of the objects that were set out in the VIFM Act.

The Bill establishes VIFM's functions to clarify the coverage of services provided by VIFM, ensure VIFM is in a position to support the Coroners Court, Victoria Police and other public entities through its services and clarify VIFM's role in conducting research, teaching and training and supporting other entities in policy development and research. The functions are designed to align with VIFM's objects and capture the full suite of services delivered by VIFM. Similar to the objects, the functions are drafted with a degree of flexibility to support VIFM's scope of services as it evolves over time.

The Bill establishes the powers available to VIFM to perform its functions. In addition to a general power to do all things necessary or convenient in order to perform its functions under the Bill, it provides for specific powers related to particular functions.

The Bill introduces an information sharing framework

Importantly, the Bill sets out clear processes for how VIFM may use and share information. VIFM collects and creates information through its support of the coronial process as directed by the Coroners Court, police investigations as requested by Victoria Police, and through the carrying out of other functions. The new information sharing powers will allow VIFM to use or disclose information it holds about an individual for teaching, training and research, and to support other entities in developing policy and conducting research, with appropriate safeguards. By clarifying VIFM's information sharing abilities, VIFM will be better placed to support other entities in the development of public health policy and research.

The Bill authorises VIFM to provide teaching and training for purposes consistent with its objects. The Bill provides that when performing this function, VIFM has the power to collect, use and disclose information it holds about an individual. Teaching and training is embedded in VIFM's day-to-day work. Existing legislative frameworks, including the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* will apply to the use of information in the context of teaching and training to ensure privacy is adequately protected when case studies are used as part of teaching and training. Any relevant court orders, for example, from the Coroners Court, must also be complied with.

The Bill also authorises VIFM to use information for the purpose of conducting research, and to disclose information to other entities to support them in developing policy or conducting research for purposes consistent with VIFM's objects. In recognition of the sensitive nature of the information VIFM holds, the Bill establishes clear safeguards to ensure the sharing of information is tightly controlled.

VIFM will only be authorised to use information in its research, or to disclose information to other entities, if doing so is not likely to prejudice a coronial investigation, criminal investigation, or a criminal proceeding that has been or may be commenced. VIFM will be required to notify the State Coroner and/or Chief

Commissioner of Police of the proposed use or disclosure and seek advice about whether they reasonably consider that the use or disclosure of information is likely to prejudice an investigation or proceeding. VIFM will be required to have regard to any advice received. In addition to these requirements, if VIFM is seeking to disclose information to another entity, VIFM must enter into a written agreement with the entity it is sharing the information with to limit the entity's use of the information appropriately.

The changes contained in the Bill complete a series of recent reforms to VIFM's infrastructure and services. The Bill will place VIFM in the best possible position to maintain its status as a world class provider of forensic services, teaching, training and research.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:18): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 29 May.

Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:21): I do rise on behalf of the opposition to address the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. From the outset I would like to, frankly, state the obvious: that this is the first year that I am aware of that this financial management gender-responsive budgeting bill has been included as part of the government's budget bills package. Ordinarily there would be the appropriation bill, the appropriation Parliament bill and the state taxation bill. This year, for the first year, included as part of the budget bills package is the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. The government states that the gender-responsive budgeting bill 2024 amends the Financial Management Act 1994 to embed gender-responsive budgeting into the Victorian budget. While the government has been reporting on gender impacts for several years, this year, as I mentioned, will mark the first year that gender-responsive budgeting will become a legislated requirement.

In undertaking some research to contribute at this point in time, I did delve a little bit further into that, and I do understand that there is an area within the Department of Treasury and Finance, the gender-responsive budgeting unit, which has ordinarily as part of their course undertaken work to understand the gender impact of budgeting on Victorians. This unit, as I understand it, develops new policies, programs and services with a gender lens to enable more inclusive design of budget initiatives. In fact DTF, being the Department of Treasury and Finance, have published gender equality budgeting statements since 2017 – since the 2017–18 budget. They have done so publicly, and these have been made available on the Department of Treasury and Finance website – the one in my hand being the first, from the 2017–18 budget.

I think it is a fair question to ask, seeing as though this unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance has established the practice of providing a gender equality budget statement as part of the Department of Treasury and Finance's ordinary work in relation to the preparation and the aftermath of the Victorian state budget: why is this new bill needed and why is this bill now included as part of the suite of budget bills? To understand that, we need to understand two areas of work – two packages of work – that have been undertaken: one because of the work of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the other being a report undertaken or commissioned by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

In 2023 the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, in their budget estimates report of October 2023, had a number of recommendations which they made in that report specifically for the

Department of Treasury and Finance. The member for Laverton Sarah Connolly was the chair at that time. My colleague in the upper house, member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region Mr McGowan, was the deputy chair of the committee at the time. There are a number of committee members, including other colleagues – Mrs McArthur of Western Victoria and Mr O'Brien the member for Gippsland South. That Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report made a number of recommendations. Finding 112 was that the 2023–24 budget included \$1 million over two years to continue the work of the gender-responsive budgeting unit in the Department of Treasury and Finance. The finding goes on to say that:

The GRBU has recorded several achievements, delivering two budgets employing gender responsive budgeting approaches and training almost 400 Victorian Public Service staff in developing gender impact assessments.

Finding 113 states that:

The 2023–24 Budget includes one new performance measure related to Gender Response Budgeting – 'Percentage of Gender Responsive Budgeting/Gender Impact Assessment information session attendees who indicated the session helped improve their understanding of the GIA requirements'.

Recommendation 67 was that:

The Department of Treasury and Finance introduce the performance measure 'Percentage of funding requests through the budget process that meet minimum gender impact consideration requirements' in the 2024–25 Budget.

Recommendation 68 of that Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report states that:

The Department of Treasury and Finance include further performance measures related to the outcomes achieved from gender responsive budgeting including the activities of the Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit in the 2024–25 Budget.

So nowhere in either of those findings nor the recommendations of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023 report does it state that there should be the establishment of a Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, but it is just interesting to note PAEC's support for ongoing funding for the gender-responsive budgeting unit and various other measures. I note that this report was one of unity; there is no dissenting report that I am aware of by other members of that committee.

To understand the origins of the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 we do need to turn our minds to the Department of Treasury and Finance commissioned report *Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women*. This was a report commissioned jointly by the Victorian Treasurer and the Minister for Women at the time, and this report was given both to the Treasurer and to the Minister for Women for their consideration. The final report is dated January 2022. Recommendation 15 in this report calls on the government to:

Embed Gender Responsive Budgeting in Victoria through legislation that secures and future proofs the practice within government.

So there we have it. There is the work of PAEC, but there is also the report commissioned by the Treasurer and the Minister for Women, the *Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women* final report of January 2022, which makes that recommendation. I do note that the inquiry panel members for the DTF report commissioned by the Treasurer and the Minister for Women included Carol Schwartz AO, Liberty Sanger OAM and James Fazzino as well – the chair and subsequent panel members. I think it is a curious mix of panel members; however, they delivered their report to the Treasurer and the Minister for Women, and within that report, as I have stated, was recommendation 15 that gender-responsive budgeting be embedded in legislation to futureproof the practice within government, so we are here today considering the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024.

The intended purpose of gender-responsive budgeting is to consider and promote gender equality and inclusivity while developing spending and taxing policies. Each year the government will be legally obliged to provide a report on the gendered impacts of the budget. Historically there was just a unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance that, under DTF's own steam, published reports. Following the passage of this bill there will be a legislative requirement. The gender impact report on the budget must be tabled on or before the appropriation bills are moved to the second-reading stage.

While we do not oppose this bill being brought forward by the government, the opposition is concerned that this legislation will not alleviate the persistent gender inequality issues faced by every Victorian. We are seeing the result of a decade of financial mismanagement by the Andrews, now Allan, Labor government, and our read of the gender impacts of Labor's 10th budget is that with record taxes, record debt and now cuts to critical services all Victorians, whether they be women and girls or men and boys, will be worse off under this budget. I do not say that lightly, as I addressed in yesterday's budget reply.

In Labor's 10th budget, women's safety remains a key concern for us. There has been a record increase in sexual and indecent assault offences against women in our communities, yet women struggle to access quality services, health care and law enforcement. New data from Respect Victoria shows that women continue to experience high rates of violence, pointing to a need for cultural change. The Respect Victoria data is as follows: around 39 per cent of women in Victoria have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15, and around 26 per cent of women in Victoria have experienced partner violence from a partner they live with, including emotional, physical, sexual and economic abuse. The Crime Statistics Agency is on the record as saying that family incidents recorded by Victoria Police, which disproportionately impact women, increased by 6.7 per cent from 82,651 in 2018–19 to 88,214 in 2019–20, an increase of 5 per cent in the rate of incidents per 100,000. These are deeply concerning statistics for us.

On the back of that data and those hard data points that we have demonstrating the impact of gendered violence in this state, we would have thought that the government would have had a greater concern to funding a solution to that in this budget. That does not appear to be the case. It could be asserted, and I will assert it, that under Labor there are many Victorian women who continue to be let down. If Labor genuinely wanted to improve gender equality in Victoria, they would have started with more funding to public health, to police, to social services, but instead this latest budget, Labor's 10th budget, saw a number of cuts in every one of those areas.

We also know that parents in Victoria are navigating childcare deserts and are unable to participate in the workforce. This is a burden that we know falls onto the shoulders of women more so than it does for men. I know my colleague the member for Euroa will be contributing straight after this contribution, and I am sure that the member for Euroa will go into further detail about the impact on the community of childcare deserts not only in her community but around the state. Currently a lack of access to child care takes almost 26,600 women entirely out of the workforce in Victoria and costs our economy \$1.5 billion a year in lost earnings alone. This is a significant cost to women who are forgoing wages that could help them get ahead as well as to our economy, which misses out on their productivity and their skills.

It is worth noting that over 50 per cent of women who say that they want to do more paid work say that a lack of access to affordable child care is the main barrier preventing them from taking on more hours. Frankly, it is incredibly concerning that a 2022 study found that having a child opens up a 55 per cent pay gap for Australian women in the workplace compared to their male colleagues in the first five years after childbirth. I know in my own family circumstance my wife Kate has experienced such a circumstance. A lack of access to childcare services reinforces traditional gender roles, as women who may want to work are often obliged to stay home or either work part-time or take on lower paid jobs closer to home in order to look after their children. We must also acknowledge the benefits of early childhood education for children, not just the economic or workforce benefits.

The Mitchell Institute at Victoria University published what many would consider a first in a report which considers the impacts of a lack of access to child care. It is something which I have looked at in some detail. I am quite impressed by the work of the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University, and it should be used to inform policy decisions when it comes to alleviating the pressures of all Victorians, especially when it comes to childcare deserts and oases across not only Victoria but Australia. Last year their findings were alarming: around 9 million Australians, or 35.2 per cent of the population, live in neighbourhoods they classify as a childcare desert, with the definition of a desert being an area where there are more than three children per one available childcare place. There are circumstances around this state where the waiting list for a childcare place can be many years, and that is simply not good enough. The report highlights how child care is scarcer in regional areas than in metropolitan areas. I do note the work of my regional Liberal and National colleagues in highlighting this challenge of families in the electorates that they serve.

This budget was about helping families – it is written on the front page of every budget paper. It is not just women that make up families, it is men as well. My view is that not only every woman but every man has an obligation and has a duty to highlight inequity when they see it before them. In making this contribution today that is my intention. When Labor say they are helping families, I ask the question: how is it helpful to cut wellbeing support for schoolkids by \$34 million, as we have seen in this year's budget? How is it helpful to cut early child sector support and regulation by some \$79 million? How is it helpful to cut child protection by \$141 million? If that is this government's version of helping Victorians, then we frankly have no interest in seeing their version of hurting Victorians.

There were significant cuts in this budget. In the lead-up to this budget we had been hearing that it would be a tough budget, that it would be a budget of cuts, but we did not realise at that point the impact in the areas that it would cut. Ambulance services and medical research funding in this budget were cut. Community crime prevention and seniors programs in this budget were cut. Family violence and mental health support services in this budget were cut. As I said yesterday, and I say it again today, these decisions to cut such programs in my view are not tough decisions through the lens of a tough budget, these are in fact cowardly decisions that potentially impact in the worst possible way on many vulnerable Victorians around this state, many vulnerable Victorians who actually need a government to be investing more in services that protect them, more in services that take care of them and more in services that ensure their safety and their wellbeing.

Sadly, through a number of cuts in this budget, I say that this government has in fact let those vulnerable Victorians down terribly. The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance, for example, getting their funding cut makes no sense whatsoever, and cuts to family violence support and mental health support in particular should deeply concern every Victorian. Through a gender-responsive lens, every Victorian, no matter their gender, uses a road. Every Victorian, no matter their gender, requires a home, a roof over their head. Gender does not discriminate when it comes to disability; disability does not discriminate when it comes gender. Every Victorian, no matter their gender, wants our tourism and major events program to be a thriving tourism and major events program. Every Victorian, no matter their gender, wants our creative industries, in Melbourne especially, the cultural home of Australia, to thrive. Every Victorian, no matter their gender, wants there to be the best resourced youth justice services, the best resourced dental services, the best resourced aged and home care services and the best resourced public IVF services. Sadly, in this budget, whether it be road maintenance, housing assistance, disability services, tourism and major events, creative industries, youth justice, dental services, aged and home care services or public IVF services, all those services that, no matter their gender, Victorians rely upon were cut in this budget. That is not a good thing at all.

In relation to IVF services, as debt hits a record high, Labor have made cuts to public IVF services which will leave Victorians waiting longer for vital treatment. As we know, IVF is a highly expensive and time-sensitive treatment, and as result of Labor's cruel cuts, women and their families will suffer.

That is an injustice. That is not right. That does not have to be the case. Sadly, this is the price that Victorian women are paying for 10 years of economic mismanagement and 10 years of economic recklessness at the hands of a government that says that it cares but in this case has demonstrated that it really, really does not.

In relation to family violence service delivery, we see Labor's \$29 million cut to funding for family violence services and, further, their cut to women's policy funding at a time when in the Victorian community women's safety is a concern for every Victorian. We have seen it not just in the Melbourne metropolitan community but in the regional community, and I am thinking about some of the possibly preventable deaths of women in the Ballarat region. These family violence services that every Victorian relies upon may very well lead to lives being saved, yet in this budget this government has cut \$29 million from family violence services. That is not going to be delivering the best outcome for vulnerable people in our Victorian community.

In the area of mental health, Labor have also delayed the rollout of 35 local mental health and wellbeing hubs in this budget. These mental health hubs were recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Like you, Deputy Speaker, I remember wandering across the Carlton Gardens to the Royal Exhibition Building to hear the work of the royal commission into mental health commissioned by this government and to hear from those who undertook that work on behalf of the Victorian people and on behalf of the Victorian government. I was at the time pleased that 35 local mental health and wellbeing hubs would be established, especially after the impact on mental health of the pandemic and the lockdowns that were experienced here in Victoria. Victorians need more mental health support now than frankly they have ever needed before. In my own community I am hearing reports from principals that still, a couple of years since the pandemic ended, they and their communities are facing difficulties in relation to mental health within their own student population and within the families within their school communities as well.

These mental health hubs were recommended by the Victorian royal commission into mental health. With one in five Victorians experiencing a mental health condition each year, now is frankly not the time to be cutting mental health services in this state but to in fact roll out community-based early intervention initiatives. Victoria lost over 800 lives to suicide in 2023, up 5.3 per cent on the year before, and 70 per cent of these individuals who we lost were in fact men. I would like to think that the bill we are considering today, the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, would take into consideration the impact of government policymaking and government decision-making budgeting priorities not just on women but also on men, especially when we hear such tragic and impactful statistics as that. Frankly, the government must do better. We must help individuals before they are at a crisis point, and rolling out the mental health hubs would have been a lifeline for so many Victorians. But sadly, that will now not be the case.

In this budget we saw cuts to cancer research, and the budget also saw a 75 per cent funding cut to leading cancer research in Victoria. With a growing and ageing population, the number of Victorians diagnosed with cancer is expected to increase from about 35,000 in 2022 to more than 50,000 in 2030. Cancer touches every Victorian, Deputy Speaker, as you know, as members of the government know, as members of the opposition know and as members of the crossbench know. Cancer touches every Victorian one way or the other. We all know someone who has been touched by cancer, whether it is a direct family member or whether it be a neighbour or a friend. Many of us in this place have lost loved ones because of cancer. If the government were going to cut anything, why on earth would they cut funding to the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre alliance? No matter your gender, cancer does not discriminate. Cancer touches the lives of every Victorian in one way or another, often in tragic circumstances. I would have thought with this new bill that we are considering, following the recommendation of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and following the recommendation of the DTF report *Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women*, that when this government looks at things through a gender-responsive budgeting lens something that touches everyone, like

cancer research funding, would not be cut. Not cutting off critical funding that helps edge closer to a cure for cancer would be my request of this government.

In the short time that I have remaining I simply want to say this: this budget historically had only three bills. We are now seeing the inclusion of a fourth, being the government's gender-responsive budgeting bill. I have gone through the reasons why the government is establishing a gender-responsive budgeting bill – on the back of the work of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and on the back of a Treasurer and Minister for Women commissioned report, which made the recommendation that gender budgeting be enshrined in legislation. That is why we are considering the bill before the Parliament today. But I do say this to the government: no matter our gender, every one of us is a Victorian, and every one of us, no matter our gender, is impacted by budgeting decisions that this government and frankly any government – a government of the future – makes. Yes, I think it is appropriate for governments to consider the gender impact of their decisions on the Victorian community, but equally this government and future governments must also consider the broad-ranging and the broad-sweeping impacts of their budget decisions on the Victorian community. After 10 Labor budgets, after 10 years of Labor and after the budget that was delivered last Tuesday by the Treasurer, the Premier's first budget – which is a budget of cuts to critical services, mainly impacting families and mainly impacting women – frankly, my request of the government is that they do better, not just for women but for men and for every Victorian.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:51): I am very happy to rise to speak on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. I will just pick up on a couple of points raised by the member for Sandringham. If you are going to query our investment in family violence, I would think again. Victoria continues to lead the nation in preventing and responding to family violence. Since the royal commission more than \$3.86 billion has been invested to transform Victoria's family violence system, and that is more than every other state and territory combined. So I just think a bit of perspective would be appreciated when we are discussing such a serious topic. That is not to say that it is done. We would be the last people to say that. We know there is so much more to do, and that is why we can see some terrific collaboration nationally, because of course this is a national and I should also say an international problem. But that is not in any way to resile from the responsibility that we take collectively to get better outcomes for our community when it comes to safety and security across the board, particularly when we are speaking to issues of family violence.

I just want to make a few further points, because I think there was a risk that there were some signals being sent that somehow there is some diminishing of focus on this incredibly important topic, which could not be further from the truth. We are unequivocal in our focus because we are determined to end family violence in Victoria. I note that we have implemented all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and we are also supporting those experiencing or who have experienced family violence with initiatives such as the statewide Orange Door network. The rollout of the Orange Door network means that there are 54 safety hubs and access points across the state, which have assisted nearly half a million Victorians, including 184,000 children. It is regrettable that any of those women and children have been exposed to these shocking circumstances, but I think it is important to acknowledge that the supports that are there and available now are really important structural reforms that we have implemented because it is the right thing to do. The Orange Door network is a nation-leading initiative that provides access to coordinated help and support for people experiencing family violence or who need assistance with the care and wellbeing – I do not know about the inference, but the word 'wellbeing' was quite rightly raised – of children and young people. The Orange Door network provides access to support, which is face to face or via telephone or email, as the case may be.

We also continue to invest in initiatives and programs that aim to prevent family violence before it starts by addressing the attitudes, beliefs, systems and structures that underpin it. This has included establishing Respect Victoria and the delivery of prevention programs across the state. More than 1950 schools across the state are delivering the Respectful Relationships program, and we have

introduced specialist family violence courts. At a local level we are supporting councils across Victoria, including in the regions, to implement prevention initiatives under the Free from Violence local government program 2024–27. We have introduced the multi-agency risk assessment and risk management framework to improve assessment and management of family violence risk, which is supported by the family violence information-sharing scheme, which enables organisations and services to share information to keep victim-survivors safe and perpetrators of violence in view. The FVISS collates relevant information from services about a perpetrator into a single report that is used by specialist family violence services to assess risk. In a practical sense this means that once family violence has been identified, a service can request additional information from other services about the perpetrator without their consent to inform a full picture of the pattern of behaviour and associated risk at any given time.

I think, just to reiterate, we have to date spent \$3.8 billion to prevent and respond to family violence. It is a continuum; it is not an end point. We acknowledge that for every single person in Victoria – and unfortunately it is predominantly women and of course the children – who may be in that situation who are exposed to any kind of extreme or bad behaviour it is regrettable, and it should not be, and we are determined to end this. On that corollary, this is why it is all the more important to have a holistic system when it comes to tackling the ways in which women are viewed and their opportunities to be able to access pathways to employment and also to be able to live independently and safely as well, and hence you will see that coming back to the bill that we have in front of us.

There is one other further point I did want to make before I speak to this bill. I do think that one has to take a little care with some of the signals we were being sent: cancer does not discriminate, this does not discriminate; that does not discriminate. What are you saying? Are you saying that we should not be putting in these measures to end the inequality that has prevailed for centuries? What are you saying? I just think the context of some of those comments was a little offhand and a little out of place with what we are prosecuting here and now – and also the efforts to undermine and diminish the many structural reforms that have already been put in to date, because we are as keen as everyone. We absolutely want to see the end to what is complete disrespect in relationships, and we are doing everything we can to achieve that, but we know there is so much more to do at a state level and nationally as well.

Coming back to the bill, this legislation will amend Victoria's primary financial legislation, the Financial Management Act 1994, to ensure that consideration of gender equality remains one of the key principles of sound financial management. The Allan Labor government made history with the passage of the Gender Equality Act 2020. This was a landmark step in breaking down discrimination and gender barriers in the workplace. This new legislation will complement the Gender Equality Act 2020, allowing the Treasurer to request gender impact assessments and ensure gender equality is given the priority it deserves. I do not think we are sort of in an *Oliver Twist* situation where it is like, 'Please, sir, give some more.' On the contrary, this is about just fairness at the end of the day – respectful relationships and fairness. Obviously we do not want to see the very dire consequences that we have seen to date and unfortunately will be happening as we speak, in spite of our best intentions and efforts to stop it, of women experiencing extremely sad and cruel situations that they should not have to experience.

I should say, giving some context to this legislation, that gender-responsive budgeting is a tool to identify budget measures that will close gender gaps and advance gender equality objectives, and I think if we see this legislation within that prism we are squarely focused on the job we have at hand and the purposive rationale for this legislation and why it is so important. Why? Because by removing embedded inequalities by considering gender in all funding decisions with a direct impact on Victorians, if everyone is treated fairly at the end of the day, we are going to have a much healthier and happier community. So it is not by biasing women to somehow advance them ahead of men; it is actually to balance, to actually achieve true equality, because we are all going to be happier and healthier as a result. It identifies how resources can be best allocated to close gender gaps – surely that

has to be a very important and critical element – and improves value for money by achieving gender equality goals concurrently with other policy goals.

If this amendment bill passes – and I would pray on the best wishes of this house and of course when it hopefully proceeds to the upper house – Victoria will become the first jurisdiction in Australia to make gender-responsive budgeting law. I would hope that that will benefit current and future generations of Victorians. It could be collectively a very positive legacy that we could leave for the future, with the caveat that we have to keep advancing protections and support to the best of our ability in this space until that day when we can say we truly have ended family violence and, at the positive end, that we are achieving true equality for all in Victoria.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:01): I rise today to speak on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, a bill that we do not oppose. 2024 marks the first time that the gender-responsive budgeting bill has been introduced as part of the government's suite of budget bills. This follows an inquiry and recommendation from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. This bill introduces legislation mandating a statement on gender equality to be included in every future Victorian budget, and that is about it.

This is not something I have a problem with. However, I would prefer that debating this bill did not come at the expense of a more robust discussion about the budget itself. The concept of having a statement on gender equality in future budgets does raise some interesting points about how this government will justify the impact that this budget and the last nine disastrous budgets from the government are having on women in our state. For starters, this budget has seen \$29 million in funding for family violence services cut at a time when women's safety is a concern for every Victorian. Under this government breaches of family violence orders continue to be the most frequent criminal offence across much of the state, including in all six local government areas in the electorate of Euroa. Most towns in my region have rates of family violence incidents that are over double the state average. Improving the safety of women in our region is a priority that needs addressing urgently. Instead, we are seeing further cuts from this government.

In Benalla there were 300 offences recorded in the past year, and the family violence rate is nearly double the state average. In the Mitchell shire there were over 700 breaches of family violence orders, nearly double the next highest offence recorded. There was also a 14 per cent rise in family violence incidents in the last year, and the rate in Mitchell shire is nearly double the statewide average as well. It is the same situation in the Strathbogie, Greater Shepparton, Greater Bendigo and Campaspe local government areas.

Across the entire state there have been approximately 54,000 breaches of intervention orders in the last year. Alongside call-outs every 6 minutes and a family violence arrest every 18 minutes, Victoria Police are engaging with 80 people who use family violence each and every day. These numbers are showing that we are in the midst of a family violence crisis. Despite these heartbreaking statistics, Seymour and Benalla do not have a dedicated physical point of contact for those experiencing family violence. There is no place to go. These are towns where family violence incidents outnumber all other criminal offences combined and make up 80 per cent of the local police's work. When the floods hit Seymour in 2022 one of the few crisis accommodations available for women fleeing domestic violence was inundated and had to close for an entire year. Victims of family violence had no alternative but to flee to Shepparton, Wangaratta or Melbourne, out of their community and away from family, support and routine. All the while the perpetrator remained in the community. For these women, without adequate support or a home to go to, leaving is just as dangerous as staying.

In September 2022 the Victorian Law Reform Commission tabled a report on stalking, harassment and similar conduct which made 45 recommendations to address this conduct. During question time the Premier confirmed the Victorian Labor government had not yet provided a formal response to the report and was unable to say when this would occur.

In 2022 the Commonwealth government allocated \$220 million to provide 500 frontline workers to support women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Again, the Premier was unable to confirm how many of these critical workers had been employed in Victoria following revelations that just 17 had been employed nationwide. It sounds like spin. Last week's budget does not instil much confidence when it comes to improving the situation, with cuts made to child protection, family violence service delivery and women's policy. No to Violence, a family violence not-for-profit, has already said the lack of support in this budget is a missed opportunity and that this budget fails to deliver. Our community does not want matching earrings and colour-coded outfits; we need genuine support and funding to address the issue. We need bail reform urgently – something that was once again raised with this government recently. We need support networks, we need dedicated local crisis locations, and we need to be heard.

In addition to this, Labor has flagged cuts to homeless and community housing services. By the end of 2025 the total number of social homes available will decrease from a target of 91,248 to a new 2025 target of 91,148. That is disgraceful. Meanwhile the housing waitlist continues to reach unimaginable levels, particularly for those trying to escape family violence. Data from last year's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing annual report shows the average wait time for public rental housing for people fleeing family violence was just under two years, up from 17 months the year before and 11 months the year prior. Can you imagine trying to flee family violence and having to wait two years for a home?

In addition to family violence, there have been cuts to women's policy for the second consecutive year. We are seeing the result of a decade of financial mismanagement under Labor, with record taxes, record debt and now cuts to services that are critical to Victorian women. Child protection is also relevant in this area, with significant cuts to the tune of \$140 million. At a time when Victoria's child protection system is in crisis, with the commissioner for children and young people describing it as underfunded, under-resourced and not fit for purpose, this government has now all but abandoned vulnerable children in its care with these dramatic cuts. Under this budget, and Labor's fifth minister in less than two years, the child protection system will continue in crisis mode, with vulnerable children and their families the victims of Labor's cruel cuts to funding.

Women's health is also set to suffer in this budget, with \$207 million cut from public health, on top of millions cut from dental services, aged care, ambulance services, health workforce training and maternal and child health. These cuts are coming at a time when our healthcare providers can least afford them, with significantly delayed ambulance response times, out of control GP and surgery waitlists, exorbitant health taxes and a general lack of resourcing.

This budget, like many before it from this government, has failed women and failed families. Putting a statement on gender equality in their budget does not resolve this; rather, it will provide a new way for this government to justify funding cuts and inaction that hurts so many in our state. The government needs to update this year's budget title from 'Helping families' to 'Hurting families', because that is the truth, because the Allan Labor government cannot manage money, and regional Victoria's most vulnerable families are paying the price.

As an example, I want to draw your attention to one of the Allan Labor government's major election commitments, which was a new childcare centre for Seymour. In a community that has been regarded as a childcare desert for nearly 30 years, this was a really, crucially important investment. In this budget it looks like it is set to be axed, with funding for Labor's new kindergarten and childcare rollout now taking a back seat due to a lack of forward thinking from this government. Seymour's childcare centre was one of 50 initially planned for the state, but it would seem to be another broken promise. It was bad enough when Labor said it would take until 2028 for the new centre to open, deterring two not-for-profits and private investors from operating a centre in town. So many communities across our state, including several within the Euroa electorate, are set to remain without child care despite desperately needing it.

I recently held an online forum to discuss the accessibility and availability of both child care and kindergarten in the region with parents, educators, and childcare providers, support staff and administrators. Those at the forum expressed concern over multiyear waitlists – a two-year waitlist in Seymour – a lack of staff, families needing to travel long distances and parents being unable to get back to work. Instead of making it easier, Labor’s attempted rollout of new childcare centres across the state has been a disaster. Child care for my region is only going backwards, and this government is single-handedly compounding the crisis. Time and time again they have shown they cannot manage money, they cannot manage a project and they cannot deliver accessible child care for our regional communities.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (11:11): As the Minister for Women, I am incredibly proud to be talking about this piece of legislation. I want to pay tribute to the late Fiona Richardson, who had the vision on this way back almost 13 years ago. As a government we are absolutely determined to build a fairer, more equitable Victoria for women and girls, and we have made some important improvements here in Victoria with a strong and progressive agenda. We are the first jurisdiction to have a gender-responsive budgeting unit and the first to put in place this sort of legislation, and we know that other states are looking to us as an example.

Implementing initiatives that benefit Victorian women and girls is a whole-of-government responsibility, and that is why this bill is so important. It puts in place mechanisms to ensure funding is allocated in ways that support more gender-equitable outcomes. Research conducted by the OECD shows thinking about gender impact early in the policy design creates better gendered outcomes. It also helps us gain better insights and deliver better outcomes and shared resources to fairly address those inequalities, those barriers, those lost opportunities. Embedding it in policy early: this is the answer.

I want to touch on the Gender Equality Act 2020. The implementation of gender-responsive budgeting builds on the requirements of the historical Gender Equality Act 2020 – the first of its kind, yet again, in Australia, led by Victoria. The Gender Equality Act was a landmark step in breaking down discrimination and gendered barriers. It applies to approximately 300 Victorian public sector organisations with 50 or more employees. This includes local councils, universities, TAFEs, hospitals, health services, water corporations, arts centres, museums and sports centres amongst others. I want to acknowledge the great work that has been done by the gender equality commissioner in assessing all of these but also driving the action plans to really address some of the gaps that exist. It targets the drivers of gender inequality across the public sector, including the gendered pay gap, gendered workplace segregation, under-representation in leadership roles, lack of workplace flexibility and sexual harassment. These are all barriers, all issues, all of the day-to-day things that women in our workforces, not just in the public sector but across all workforces, face. We want to break down those barriers, and that is exactly what the Gender Equality Act is doing and what gender-responsive budgeting is doing as well.

The act places a really positive duty on organisations to take action towards gender equality, and they are required to conduct workplace gender audits and develop gendered equality action plans and gender equality indicators. What we mean by that is actually putting plans in place and then measuring them, reporting publicly on those measures every two years and undertaking gender impact assessments. These gender impact assessments are requirements for organisations to have policies and services that directly and significantly impact the policies that those public servants are delivering to the public. As a policy decision, any budget initiative is considered to have a significant impact, and an impact on the public is required to have a gender impact assessment. The bill is embedding this important process – gender-responsive budgeting – into legislation.

In August 2022 the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector published, for the first time, comprehensive data on the state and the nature of gender inequality in our public service. The workplace gender audit baseline report reported a statewide level of measurements across issues on

sexual harassment, on gender pay gaps, on gender segregation in workforces and also on the way that processes in regard to promotion and recruitment are undertaken. The key findings from the report that was released by the commission show that the total remuneration pay gap for the Victorian public service is 15.6 per cent and that women make up 66 per cent of the public sector workforce but only 46 per cent of senior leadership management roles. Women reported double the rate of experiencing sexual harassment when compared to men, and male-dominated industries had a much higher rate of sexual harassment. These are the challenges we face, but at least now we have a baseline to look at and plans to improve it.

Victoria's new gender equality strategy, *Our Equal State*, also puts in place a range of actions and of course strategies to work forward. The strategy itself provides a legislative mechanism to legislate and prioritise the strategy across the state. As part of our requirements under the Gender Equality Act 2020, we must report back to Parliament on our progress towards implementing the strategy every two years, and I was proud to be able to launch *Our Equal State* in August last year. *Our Equal State* takes a life-course approach to gender equality, focusing on childhood, youth, adulthood and older age, to highlight the gendered gaps in choices and opportunities between women and men and diverse genders at all ages. Our priorities at each stage of life have focused on cultural change, health and wellbeing, safety and respect, economic security and public sector leadership, and the strategy includes 110 whole-of-government, Victorian government specific, aims and actions. The strategy also recognises that gender inequality is further compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination, such as racism, homophobia, ableism and ageism.

Our Equal State recognises the government is in a unique position to lead by example. That is why we are setting concrete, measurable targets, including halving the pay gap in the Victorian public sector within the next five years, reaching gender pay equity in CEO roles and senior leadership roles in each portfolio in the public sector within the next five years and doubling the number of men taking available paid parental leave in the Victorian public sector, again in the next five years, to help rebalance gendered uptake of care and childcare entitlements.

Another significant commitment under *Our Equal State* of course was embedding gender-responsive budgeting in legislation, which is what we are doing today and which makes me so proud to be part of this government. Last week's budget invests \$6.1 billion towards advancing gender equity in this state, and more than 130 of our budget initiatives have been assessed as having a positive impact on gender equality. These initiatives will provide gender equality at a statewide level, change attitudes and improve gender equality by reducing gaps in outcomes, access and participation.

Gender-responsive budgeting highlights that not every budget outcome which benefits women needs to fall under the women's portfolio; they fall under every portfolio. For example, this government is investing \$1.8 billion to increase women's economic participation by supporting women workers into male-dominated sectors but also supporting women in women-dominated sectors and helping those women to re-skill and train up. This budget also allocates \$292 million to assist with the cost-of-living pressures that we know disproportionately affect women. Our important Best Start, Best Life policy is helping with an enormous contribution of allowing more women the opportunity to work more hours or to upskill and take on higher roles because they have that support of three- and four-year-old kinder.

The gender-responsive budgeting bill will enshrine a commitment to consider and promote gender equality and inclusivity in principles of financial management. It does not get better than this. For women to have a government that is looking directly at its own bottom line around how it is resourcing opportunities for women is a fantastic step forward. We all have a role to play in the pursuit of gender equality, and I want to thank the Treasurer and his staff and department for their cooperation and also thank the Office for Women for the work that they have been doing around this. I know that everyone on this side of the house is extremely proud of this bill.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:21): I rise to speak on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, which is the first year we have seen this bill included in the bills budget package. The bill amends the Financial Management Act 1994 to ensure that a gender lens is cast over the legislation that is presented in this Parliament. At the bill briefing I asked the question – or somebody asked the question – ‘What actually will change?’, and what I heard in the response was ‘Nothing’. That makes me understand once again how this is a government that likes to do stunts that actually do not get results or outcomes, which is what our community actually needs from a government.

We see the budget that was handed down and guillotined off last night, giving very few people the opportunity to speak about it, and I am not surprised, because this is a budget that the government should be actually apologising to the Victorian people for presenting. It is a budget that, as a result of years and years of mismanagement, we see laid out there for everyone to see that this Labor government have not managed money. They cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and Victorian people are paying the price.

The gender equity that this government speaks about is not demonstrated at all in the actions of what this government is delivering. We see that. Whether they are diluting, delaying or cutting, what we are seeing is very disappointing results. One of those disappointing results that I will highlight is this: if you are serious about gender equity, then when you have got males with high suicide rates in the regions, you would hardly be thinking you would see a cut to mental health. I have raised in this Parliament the challenges we are seeing in our schools and our students. As I just said, male suicide rates are going up, and the community desperately requires more mental health support and mental illness support. But what we are seeing is less funding.

In South-West Coast we are not going to see an increase of 25 per cent to the acute mental health beds as promised. We are not going to see the mental health locals, for which Warrnambool was in the next tranche of the rollout. We are not going to see that. They help people in the community remain mentally able to manage, and they help with anxiety and depression. They do a lot of alcohol and drug counselling, and that is desperately needed in South-West Coast. That is why the government announced it. They sang from the mountains that they were doing a wonderful job in mental health, and yet in the budget there is cut after cut. Those mental health acute beds – not going to be delivered. That mental health local in Warrnambool – not going to be delivered.

I know that this government is fully aware that we have seen a massive increase in drug and alcohol use in the community since COVID – I think a 40 per cent increase in demand for drug and alcohol rehabilitation beds – and yet South-West Coast remains the one place in Victoria that has not had an announcement. Once again in this budget the Lookout drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre was overlooked by this government, and we remain the only place in Victoria that does not have that available to the families. They need to remain in their communities. Women particularly need to remain in their communities. The Aboriginal community have highlighted that need for their community as well to stay in the community to be rehabilitated in the community around the supports of their family while addressing drug and alcohol use and misuse. It is absolutely fundamental to the success of the program, but once again it was overlooked.

It is not just mental health, it is the health budget too. The government spruiked about putting \$8.8 billion into the health system yet in their own press release talked about the fact that prices have gone up, costs have gone up, medicines have gone up, cost of energy has gone up. They have not been funding the health system appropriately for the hospitals to actually deliver health. We have seen that in Portland, where we have had cuts to many, many services. We have not had an announcement of the new CEO. They have gone completely quiet on Portland. I have to ask the question: is that because the government has an agenda? I have been pointing this out in this place for over two years, since I asked the last health minister, ‘Does the minister have plans to merge Portland? Does Port Fairy have the right into the future to have its own board?’ The Port Fairy hospital fought so hard to get funding over the years and to have the community raise money as they do. Heywood is the same; is Heywood

hospital going to have its own board into the future? Are they going to be able to determine what their health service needs are for their community and have a say in that? Is Warrnambool going to have their own health service that they can have a say on? Is it going to be the hub, or is it going to be all swallowed up? It is time the minister came clean and told the community what the plan is, because the communities of Portland, Heywood, Port Fairy and Warrnambool all deserve to understand what the minister has planned.

No more shocks, no more surprises – like the shock that the schools got when they announced this \$400 payment to the schools that is not going to go anywhere near the family. Schools in my electorate, the Catholic schools in particular, are absolutely disgusted. They called it a shock announcement with no consultation and a most unfair announcement that gives it to children of wealthy families that go to a public school, like the Oakleigh South Primary School that was highlighted in the *Herald Sun* last week as one of the top 100 primary schools. I am sure there are parents there who do not qualify as low socio-economic and do not need support who will get the \$400 bonus, but a school like Our Lady Help of Christians, where the children might be on low socio-economic status, is not going to get that. It is the most unfair system that they have invented that will not go to the children who need it, particularly those in South-West Coast at the Catholic schools. It is just really unfair, and this government have made a massive error of judgement by giving it to the wealthy who do not need it, and all that was asked for by the Catholic schools was to means-test it. These schools have to administer it; it is another task, just like the hospitals who cannot manage to have enough staff to do all the reporting that is required. The Royal Melbourne has the same reporting as Warrnambool Base Hospital and Port Fairy has the same as Warrnambool Base Hospital, and they do not have the extra staff because the government have not been funding them appropriately. We have seen so many cuts to programs that you just wonder about this whole gender equality lens. How can you say there is an equality lens when you look at what they have done to the CFA? The Country Fire Authority have been completely thrown to the wolves; they have not been given the funding they need for their trucks and the equipment that they need updated. These are volunteers.

The farmers have come out pretty angry today. They are angry because what the government are doing is they want to pay more money to the United Firefighters Union, and this is what angers farmers the most who volunteer. As they struggle to replace their ageing trucks and dilapidated stations –

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I believe the member has strayed from the debate.

Roma BRITNELL: This is a bill about equality, about gender equality, and in the bill briefing they talked about the fact that it is about males as well as females, and I referred to that in the suicide reference I made about males. I am talking about equality, and that is what this bill is about.

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, while I appreciate that it has been a wideranging debate and will continue to no doubt be a wideranging debate, and the member does have a valid point when she wants to talk about the health and mental health of all Victorians, including men, to then start talking about fire trucks may be just stretching the parameters of relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): I will rule on the point of order. It has been a wideranging debate, and I think the member was straying into areas that were not in the bill, and I would ask that the member continue to refer in her contribution to the bill.

Roma BRITNELL: I will continue to refer to the gender inequality that is occurring right across our state from the state government, particularly in the regions, which is what I was discussing when I was pulled up by a point of order. The regions have been severely disadvantaged, and that means any equality lens that has been cast across the legislation or budgetary decisions that this government have made has been less than equitable – in fact most unfair – and regional Victorians are suffering. We have seen a 30 per cent cut in agriculture. We saw over 100 staff from Agriculture Victoria cut last year, and now we have got a government that says they care about biosecurity but cuts agriculture.

Just let us see what happens when we have a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak and whether there are enough people on the ground to actually roll out those biosecurity measures. That is when this will demonstrate itself. When we are talking about inequality across this state, it is there in the budget for all to see.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (11:31): I will approach this debate quite calmly, I think. At the heart of family violence are disrespect and inequality.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Vicki WARD: Disrespect and inequality, which includes interjecting across the chamber. Victoria has led our nation when it comes to responding to the challenges of family violence. Close to \$4 billion has been invested by this government since we were elected in responding to family violence. Those opposite try to pretend that they know what we are investing in family violence, and they are absolutely incorrect. We were the first in our nation to implement a royal commission. We were the first ones to take this seriously. We were the first ones to take serious action in response to family violence. We implemented all 227 recommendations, many of those nation leading. We have heard that our work, our investment and the work of the sector – the workforce that we have increased by 2000 – is nothing more than slogans and earrings. That is what we hear from those opposite, which is absolutely disrespectful. I have my motor neurone disease badge on me today, as do many of those opposite. I would ask those opposite whether this is tokenistic, whether this is meaningless, whether it is meaningless for us to sit in here with our beanies. It is not. My mother-in-law died from motor neurone disease. For us to wear badges, for us to wear earrings, for us to have slogans on T-shirts is not –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister has strayed from the bill. The fact that we are wearing badges is not relevant to gender equality. I think it is a very similar point of order that was called on the last speaker, me. Thank you for addressing this.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): It was a little difficult to hear the minister over the interjections from the member for South-West Coast, but I do ask the minister to come to the bill.

Vicki WARD: The link that I was making was about the comments made by those opposite in the course of this debate thus far that we have been tokenistic in wearing earrings and having slogans and the rest of it. I am saying that wearing a badge is comparable to wearing earrings that say ‘Respect women’. That is the point I was making, and that is why I say to you that the member for South-West Coast was not actually listening to what I was saying. To go to your point, Acting Speaker, she was too busy interjecting things about which she clearly does not understand. Let us talk for a minute about these earrings. The ‘Respect women’ earrings that I wear –

A member: I wear them.

Vicki WARD: Many of us on this side of the chamber wear them. The Premier wears them. We wear these earrings that are made by the Haus of Dizzy, a business in Fitzroy created by a proud Wiradjuri woman Kristy Dickinson. This is a great small business that we on this side of the chamber are very happy to support, because we want women to have economic power, we want women to be economically strong, because when women are economically strong, they have healthier lives and they have better lives. That is exactly what this budget does, and this is exactly what this bill comes to, which is about gender equality.

There are those opposite who will say that family violence has nothing to do with gender equality, and it just shows you how little they know, because at the heart of family violence are disrespect and inequality. Because if you are not going around punching your mate, disrespecting your mate, being rude to your mate, belittling your mate and coercively controlling your mate, because he is your mate, but you are doing it to your partner and you are doing it to your children, that is about inequality and that is about disrespect. It is about a power imbalance, and that is exactly the root of family violence.

We on this side of the chamber understand that. That is why we have invested close to \$4 billion. That is why this budget invests \$211 million in responding to the challenges of family violence. These challenges keep happening, and we will keep responding to them, because this government will not back down from pushing down on family violence. We will continue to pull every lever available to us to reduce those numbers. Women are getting murdered, and we want it to stop. Women are having to flee their homes, and we want it to stop. Children are being traumatised because of the violence they are witnessing or experiencing, and we want it to stop.

For those opposite, who barely come to an election with a family violence policy and who are barely able to articulate the ins and outs of family violence, to come into this place and lecture us and tell us that we are cutting when we are not is absolutely shameful and is disrespectful. We are absolutely leading the nation, and we will continue to do so, because this issue is too important not to. As I have said in this place, we have had visitations from people from interstate and internationally who come to Victoria to see what we are doing. They have come to visit our Orange Doors. We have got 54 of them across our state that are safety hubs for people to come to when they need help in resolving a family violence issue, in dealing with family violence and in understanding what supports are there for them, but also they are helping those who are actually using violence, because that is at the heart of this problem. We have to work with those people who are using violence, who we know are predominantly men. We have a very serious challenge, and we will continue to address that challenge. We have at least 57,000 men in this state committing violence every year, according to Victoria Police statistics, and that does not include what is under-reported or what does not get reported. So we have tens of thousands of men in this state who are choosing to use violence every year.

For those opposite to say that this government is not doing anything and is doing nothing more than slogans and earnings is absolutely disrespectful. I will tell you what, it is absolutely disrespectful to that workforce, those people who are so proud of the work we are doing in this state and who are so proud that we are leading the nation and that much of what we are doing is actually world leading. They are so proud of the rigour that is being applied. They are so proud of what they do, and they have every right to be proud, because they are tremendous workers. These people turn up to work every day not knowing what trauma they need to manage and not knowing what person they will have to help rebuild their life and what they have experienced. These people listen to stories of immense pain and of immense hurt, and they keep turning up to work every single day. These people are amazing. They are wonderful. For those opposite to say that the work that we invest in, their work, is nothing more than earnings and slogans is disrespectful to this incredible workforce that deserves so much more from those opposite. It deserves their support. It deserves their investment. You will struggle to find anywhere where they are able to articulate what their investment in family violence would be. Election after election, you hear silence. This is not an issue that they are ready to address or that they are ready to put the serious money into that we have.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, under standing order 118, the minister is reflecting, and I take personal offence at the comments the minister is making. The minister might be surprised what men and boys –

Vicki WARD: You might be surprised, mate.

James Newbury: Acting Speaker, I have just been attacked across the chamber while trying to raise a point of order. I am trying to raise a point of order. The minister might be surprised that people in this chamber have been victims of family violence, and to impugn people across this side of the chamber is unparliamentary. It is unparliamentary, and I would ask the minister to think about that in terms of the comments that are being made in relation to this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): What is your point of order?

James Newbury: 118, under which I take personal offence.

Vicki WARD: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is misrepresenting me and what I said. What I was taking personal offence to was those opposite saying that what this government has done is nothing more than earrings and slogans, and that is absolutely not the case. I do not think the member has articulated what he has actually taken offence to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): On the point of order before I call the next member, the reflections that were made by the minister were not a reflection on any individual, so I do not accept that there is a point of order.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (11:41): Given that the member for Brighton is referring to someone who I can only assume to be me, I will address the issue. Do I take personal offence to it? Yes, I do. It has been very public that after 22 years I have finally found the voice, the courage, to stand up and say, 'Actually there is someone in this place that does know a thing or two.' You can talk about investment all you want, you can talk as much as you like about investment and you can talk about stats, but in Mildura we are seeing the highest rate of family violence in this state. We are not seeing results in bringing that down. So I thank the member for Brighton for raising his point of order, because when the minister refers to 'those on the other side' it is a collective; we are all a team. I would not be standing here today without the support of this team and without the support of my family team. So do I take personal offence? Yes, I do – I absolutely do.

I had prepared more of a comprehensive response to the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024, which I may get to, but let me address some of the issues that I did want to talk about. I have spoken about family violence until I have been blue in the face for the last two weeks, and I would say that this will be the last time but I do not think it will be, because now that I have found a bit of a voice it will come up again, it really will, because of the rates of family violence and women dying. It is largely women; we know that. Of the 14,000 people in Mildura alone that are working with extraordinary organisations on the ground like Mallee Family Care and MASP, the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, 90 per cent are women. We know that. Yes, it happens the other way, but 90 per cent of them are women. As the member for Euroa said, they are waiting up to two years – they are going into the department's offices to seek housing and they are being given tents. Could you imagine needing somewhere safe to go and being given a tent? Come on.

So the minister can stand there and talk about any amount of investment or earrings – which, I am sorry, I do not wear; as a victim myself, I do not – and she can talk about investment all she wants, but it is disingenuous. I find it almost condescending. I find it offensive when women still, after all of this investment, are being given tents as a solution. Where is that investment ending up? That is not okay. It is never okay. Yes, she spoke a lot about disrespect. Is that how I feel at the moment? Absolutely. And she could not even stay. She could not even give me respect enough to stay until I was finished, or look me in the eye. And she knows; I have been in the *Herald Sun* in the last two weeks. I did a podcast with Neil Mitchell yesterday. This is not a secret. The Premier – which I was very thankful for – came and found me last week to have a quiet word. The Minister for Prevention of Family Violence cannot look me in the eye and walked out. Again, I thank the member for Brighton for taking a point of order and calling it out, because it is about time we called out disrespect in all forms and in this place as well. Just be aware of your surroundings. That is all I have got to say.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (11:46): I only came in at the last minute and it is obviously an extraordinarily difficult time for the member, but I just want to put on the record that the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence was relieving me of my chamber duties. She was not meant to be here; she had another appointment. It is inappropriate to impugn her for not staying for any reason other than the fact that she was relieving me and she had to go.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (11:46): I would like to start my contribution by recognising the member for Mildura and the work that she is doing to share her story to give voice to so many people who are voiceless. I really want to thank you for what you are doing through the press and what you

are doing to empower other women to be able to talk about it and stuff like that. We are all indebted to you, so thank you very much. I really want that on the record.

I would also like to make mention of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, who is a fierce advocate for women in this state. Following the death – the murders – of three women in Ballarat, she came to my community and met with people, met with stakeholders. She has spoken with so many people in my community, and I want to say how important that has been for my community, for different levels of government, for her to be there and for the work that we are doing. In saying that, I would really like to say thank you to all our organisations who are working in the family violence space. The member for Eureka, the member for Ripon and I had the opportunity to do a round table with them on Monday to really talk about how we can be supporting them. We do know – and I do believe this – that through our gender-responsive budgeting we are changing the conversation and we are changing the dial when it comes to the allocation of resources for people in Victoria. We are ensuring that women and children and girls are being looked after in every budget decision because of this important bill that we have before us.

What we are doing with the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill is seeking to embed gender equality and inclusivity considerations within the Victorian budgeting process. Addressing gender equality is a hallmark of this government. We have introduced the Gender Equality Act 2020 as well as the landmark gender equality strategy and action plan called *Our Equal State*. If you have not looked at this document, I encourage everybody to seek out *Our Equal State*, because it is our road map, it is our state's road map for action in gender equality until 2027. When it comes to gender equality – it has been said before, but it needs to be reinforced – Victoria proudly leads the nation. We are making great progress towards making our state fairer and more equal for all. In doing so it is essential that when we are allocating public resources – taxpayers money, public money – we examine the socio-economic impact on women and girls when we spend that money. It cannot be how we have done it before. We need a change. We need to put a microscope over our decisions and ask who is actually benefiting, who are we actually targeting, who are we supporting and how are we addressing gender equality in this state. That is the heart of gender-responsive budgeting, and that is what we are doing.

I would like to thank the Treasurer, who has delivered his 10th budget. Over the last decade the Treasurer has been a champion of gender equality. The Treasurer has supported our \$3.8 billion investment in family violence services following our landmark royal commission, once again leading the nation, because we know that when we address men's violence against women we are addressing gender equality. I would also like to thank the ministerial office and recognise the work of the gender-responsive budgeting unit within the department. I would also like to thank the Premier, and the Minister for Women, who has already made a contribution on this bill, for talking about everything that we are doing. Within our government, within our cabinet and within our party room we have so many incredible women role models who are changing the way business is done in Victoria and changing the way money is spent in Victoria, because we know that when you include women around decision-making tables, you not only get better outcomes for women and girls but better outcomes for everyone.

The 2024–25 Victorian budget includes over 130 initiatives which have been assessed as positively impacting gender equality. Included in the budget are multiple initiatives that will improve the health and wellbeing of women and girls. In the area of health we are addressing the pain gap, with over \$18 million for preventative care, community outreach and health and education across women's health organisations. We are also investing in the wellbeing of new mums – I am so excited we have got so many mums-to-be in the chamber. That is why we are including funding for universal as well as enhanced and Aboriginal maternal and child health services, funding for the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program in rural and regional areas, and funding for new facilities and services benefiting women within the Monash Medical Centre redevelopment.

We have also committed \$31 million to support those living with eating disorders, which overwhelmingly impact women and girls. I would really like to recognise and honour the work of the eating disorder clinic at the Grampians Health service in Ballarat, which I am very proud got funded in last year's budget. I would like to thank Dr Dave Tickell and the incredible team who are working with people experiencing eating disorders in regional communities. We know during COVID that our paediatric wards in Ballarat, in Geelong, in Bendigo and in regional centres were filled with young people with eating disorders. We know that this \$31 million is going to go a long way to support people with eating disorders that, as we said, disproportionately affect girls and women, because eating disorders often continue through adolescence and through your whole life.

I am also proud to say that this budget includes \$5.4 million for a new mental health, alcohol and other drug emergency department at the Ballarat Base Hospital, designed to incorporate the unique needs of women accessing specialist services in my community. Like so many of us, we have far too many people needing additional support for alcohol, drug and mental health issues, so I welcome this \$5.4 million investment at Ballarat Base Hospital. I also thank our emergency department workers, particularly our nurses, who do such an incredible job.

On top of these investments into women's health, we are also promoting women's economic security. The 2024–25 budget includes investment in women's leadership programs and mentoring programs, as well as supporting women's representation within the startup sector. As chair of the Victorian Honour Roll of Women panel, I have the opportunity to work with incredible women to recognise and elevate the remarkable contribution of Victorian women who are trailblazers, local champions, change agents and emerging leaders. Since the establishment of the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2001, we have honoured and recognised close to 750 women. I would like to thank the 2024 judging panel – excellent, extraordinary women – and I look forward to working with them again this year in the coming months as we induct more great Victorian women who are role models and who every day address issues of gender inequality.

We are also investing in vocational education and training, we are doing our three- and four-year-old kinder programs, we are doing outside-school-hours care programs at small and regional schools and we are doing our continued rollout of the government owned and operated early learning centres. We know that because women continue to earn less money than men, cost-of-living pressures impact harder on women, and that is why I am very proud that we are supporting families with our \$400 school saving bonus as well as tripling our Glasses for Kids program.

Homelessness is another issue that is a real issue for gender inequality in this state. We know that women are particularly vulnerable to homelessness – those over the age of 40 and even more so women over 55. Significant contributors to this are the financial barriers that many women face throughout the course of their lives, which can include time out of the workforce, delayed career progression or family violence leading to economic and housing instability. So that is why we are investing \$216 million in support for people experiencing homelessness.

What I want to say with the very limited time left is that when we put women at the heart of our decision-making, when we put a lens over women and the impact that our budget has on women, we make better decisions for all Victorians. We make sure that taxpayers money is being used to make sure that gender inequality in this state is being addressed. I am so proud that we are putting this into legislation. I am so proud that as a state we recognise that gender inequality is never acceptable.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (11:57): I rise to speak to the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. From the outset can I pay tribute to the member for Mildura, who shared a very profound contribution today, and also just so respect the work she has done in this space in terms of her advocacy. I was watching from my office when she did share earlier just today, and it was incredibly moving. I honestly have shivers down my spine just watching what she does, the bravery with which she does it and the courage that she has, so I just pay my tributes and my respects to her and to anyone here in this place or outside watching that has been a victim of

domestic violence. It is because of you that we are here, it is you that we are fighting for, it is you that we want to legislate for so that we see progress in this area, and so to each and every one of you I pay my deepest respects. We hope that we respect everything that you have gone through, so I hope to make sure that we do that accordingly.

I am always committed to protecting women and girls and I will always fight for their protection. However, what I have to say about this bill is that, as mentioned before, it is a smokescreen for the government's failures regarding women's issues. I am proud in this place to stand here as the youngest woman in this chamber as well as the first woman to represent the seat of Warrandyte and the first Asian-Australian woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly. I am proud to be a woman and I am proud to have these as firsts, so that is why whilst we do not oppose this bill I would like to raise that the government, whilst loving to grandstand about supporting women in the last budget, exposed their hollow virtue signalling by slashing funding to critical services that women do depend on.

So let us have a look at some of them. Firstly, public IVF services – in this budget the government has cut public IVF services by \$42 million. This is something I have spoken about in this place before, and it was in the context of the cruel cancellations by this government during code brown and COVID lockdowns where public IVF was halted, unlike other jurisdictions. I have had so many families locally contact me, when we have put that to social media, to talk about their personal struggles, their lived experiences around IVF, and I know it is such a sensitive issue for women. It is a live and real issue to so many in our community. In fact it was the Minister for Health who previously emphasised the importance of public IVF and said that they were:

... doing what matters. We are working hard so that prospective families have every opportunity to be happy, healthy ...

et cetera. In fact the Premier has expressed her past support for IVF and its positive impact on women's opportunities for pregnancy, and she said this when she was as new to this place as I am:

There are many women, as honourable members know, who want to have children but who, because of infertility, are unable to do so. The ... (IVF) program over the past 20 years has provided enormous and exciting opportunities ... to become pregnant.

That is what the Minister for Health and the Premier have said. Contrast the \$42 million that public IVF services have been cut by with their support statements, and it does not quite match up. Again I say this: IVF is not just a medical procedure, it is a lifeline that extends hope to countless individuals and couples who yearn to experience the joys of parenthood. I have sat with women in my community and cried with them as they have spoken to me about their challenges and about the process and the physical strain that IVF has on their bodies, on themselves, on their families and on their marriages – the challenges that they go through. I have sat there and supported them, and I have to say that cutting \$42 million is not how you support women. They move virtue-signalling motions about their support for public IVF and then, at the first chance they get in the new budget, rip funding to shreds.

There is that, but the cuts to IVF are not the only way this budget has let down women. Another area in which we have seen cuts is a cut of \$79 million in early childhood sector supports and regulation. That is an 11 per cent cut, stripped away from the early childhood sector. While the government are busy spruiking their \$400 support payments for schoolchildren, they have meanwhile gutted their wellbeing support for schoolkids – \$34 million has been cut from that and its rising mental health challenges. That is an 8.4 per cent cut.

While we are talking about this \$400 support payment, which the government loves to spruik and talk about and publicise, what I have seen as the reality in my office is email after email from people who send their kids to Catholic schools who will not receive this \$400 school saver bonus. Let me quote one of these emails to you. A local constituent said:

It is so disappointing to hear that once again, our decision to choose an education system that is not state funded has resulted in our young people and families missing out on financial support.

Like all families attending state schools ... we too are experiencing and trying to manage the increase in cost-of-living expenses. Our choice to engage in the catholic system should not be seen as 'we can afford to pay more' or 'to miss out on financial support'.

Most of us are hard working families that are doing our best to simply get by. The frequent alienation and exclusion of families who choose non-government schools is disappointing and needs to stop.

I urge you to reflect on ...

this, and she goes on. Email after email I have received about this. Catholic and non-government schools are not getting this funding, and the disappointing thing is that for so many they are the people that are vulnerable in our communities. That includes people like migrant families. That includes people who are wanting to do their best and to send their kids to the best school that they can. We know that one in five Victorian students attend Catholic schools in Victoria. I know from some of my local Catholic schools, like Holy Spirit Community primary school in Ringwood North, St Anne's Primary School in Park Orchards and Whitefriars College in Donvale, that these are hardworking families from all walks of life.

In fact the Victorian Catholic Education Authority has called this out for what it is, 'discriminatory and unfair', calling it out as 'the most divisive and discriminatory government education policy in recent history'. Their acting CEO Bruce Phillips is asking why the government is 'treating families in Catholic schools like second-class citizens'. How is that for equality, Victoria? What does this wellbeing support for schoolkids look like? It looks like deferring the establishment of 35 local mental health and wellbeing hubs for kids. It looks like failing to fund and delaying this rollout. We have also seen – and I know it has been mentioned in this place – with this budget a \$29 million cut to family violence service delivery, contradicting the government's claims of tackling family violence. Further to that, there is a cut to women's policy funding, with continuous cuts, including \$3 million last year and another \$300,000 this year. There you have it, ladies and gentlemen: not only can the Labor government not manage money but they are also a government of contradictions and failures. They care more about virtue signalling than they do about tangible outcomes or providing adequate funding to these areas that matter.

If we look at this bill that we are speaking about, where future budgets will require a statement on gender equality, I hope there will be honesty in these statements, reflecting how the government is failing women and how the government voted down and opposed the coalition when we tried to introduce into this place a strengthening of bail laws. When one woman every four days was dying at the hands of gendered violence, we tried to strengthen bail laws so that we could protect women in a tangible way. Let it be on the record in these future budgets that that was opposed. Let it be on the record that the government voted down and opposed the coalition when last year we tried to pass a bill to prohibit the use of machetes so that we could again protect women from being victims of knife crime and violence.

Finally, if the Labor Party is serious about improving the lives of women, they could start by changing their own recruitment strategy in their own party before creep corner gets fuller. How about being serious in your own patch about protecting women, about making a difference and about dealing with the rot in your own party before you virtue signal with legislation? I do not need to speak about that further and I do not need to elaborate, but this is again evidence of the Labor Allan government virtue signalling and showing what they really mean. It is just tokenism, not actually doing the work of legislation to protect women and to look after women, which we will continue to do day in and day out in this place.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:06): It gives me great pleasure and immense pride in our government to make my contribution on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. But before I proceed further, I would like to mention the member for Mildura and express my support for her and acknowledge the courage that she has displayed in talking about her own private and personal experience with family violence. It takes incredible courage to share

stories like those, and I do just want to acknowledge that, as my colleague the member for Wendouree also acknowledged, and extend my condolences and love to her.

I will now continue on to discuss this bill, and it is an important bill. Much has been said about being tokenistic, but it is not tokenistic. Indeed should this bill become legislation, as noted by the Minister for Women, Victoria will once again lead our nation by being the first jurisdiction in this country to enshrine into legislation that every budget in the future includes a statement about gender equality. That is quite important. In fact, before I go into the detail of the legislation, just the understanding that it will be required by law that this be produced is important.

When I was thinking about this, I cast my mind back to the introduction of the GST. Back then it was all the talk. A goods and services tax was to be applied to what were considered luxury items, back in 2000 if I remember correctly. At the time razor blades – so that men could shave – were exempt from GST because they were considered essential. Personal grooming for men was considered essential, and therefore razor blades did not attract the tax. But women's sanitary products were slugged with the 10 per cent GST. I can tell you it is not a luxury item. A sanitary product – be it a tampon, be it a pad or be it a menstrual cup, which you find nowadays but which really were not around 25-odd years ago – is not a luxury item. How did we manage to attract a 10 per cent tax federally on something that we all consider quite a necessity? In my mind I was thinking, 'If there had been something like this requiring the Commonwealth government to produce some kind of gender-responsive budgeting and a statement of it, I suspect that that GST anomaly may not have occurred.' This ensures that when we are budgeting, when we are creating legislation and when the Treasury department has to look at anything, we are putting a gender lens over it, and I think that is incredibly important. It is much more important than that little example I have given, but that is the first thing that occurred to me because it was actually the first time I went on a protest march back in the day. It was actually to protest the fact that women were going to be taxed but men were not going to be. So I will continue discussing this bill, but I just wanted to put that out there for anyone thinking about whether or not it is important to include legislation such as this, and I do believe it is.

I want to just also discuss a number of issues when it comes to the accusations flying that we really are not doing much over here in government. I have to counter a lot of what has been sent our way from some of those opposite. The member for Wendouree has actually noted a number of different initiatives that our government has done. But to distil it just to a personal example, we opened an Orange Door in Belgrave at the end of last year, and it is the only Orange Door which is actually located in the district of Monbulk and servicing the people of the hills. It was incredibly well received. Obviously – and it has been discussed at length, even having Rosie Batty here yesterday visiting – looking at the horrific deaths of women at the hands of intimate partners or former partners this year has brought to the fore how important it is that we continue the work that we are doing.

The Orange Door was opened in Belgrave, and I popped down last week because I wanted to just give them a bit of a gift because I know that they have been busy, in fact probably busier than ever. I went down to say hello, and I spoke with one of the amazing workers there, who confirmed that they were run off their feet – incredibly, incredibly busy. But there was something else she told me which was interesting. She is doing an online course to better know how to respond to victims of sexual crimes. This online course that she is doing is at night. She is one of the few from Victoria in it; it has participants from all across the country. When she started explaining what we are doing here in Victoria in terms of the programs we have and in terms of the money that we are putting behind family violence, all the participants were stunned. They could not believe how advanced we were, how progressive we were and how much not only were we talking about addressing family violence but we were really doing something tangible about it, and we have been for quite some time.

I am incredibly proud to be a part of this government. Not for one moment, though, do any of us here think that the problem is solved – no way known. We know there is so much further to go. Far too many women are dying in this country. I have stopped watching the news myself. It is heartbreaking. Someone who actually came to my shop when we were doing some work, turned out to be someone

who managed to – sorry, I am not expressing this terribly well. He killed his partner as she was trying to leave him. So I have met him, and I was beyond shocked. I was shocked because I thought why? Why is this still happening? It touches all of us in one way or another. I do know that, as I said before, the member for Mildura has shared her story, but I do suspect she is not the only person in here with real-life experience, personal experience, so I am being as gentle as I can as I discuss this with as much compassion as I can. I apologise if I am not eloquent in my expression at the moment, but I am really deeply affected, as we all are at different times, by the scourge of family violence. But I am also really proud that, as a government, we have really invested in trying to address this. For a good 10 years we have been working so hard in this space. There is much further to go. We know that. No-one here shies away from that.

I just want to say that legislation like this can be brushed off by some as being tokenistic, but it is not, because our actions matter. What we decide to enshrine in legislation speaks to us, to the values that we hold. We are living our values. As I say, we know that we are not there yet. There is so much further to go. But every day when we show up, I know that my colleagues here and I know that everyone in this chamber does not want to see the perpetration of inequality, of violence against women or children. We want that to stop. We have got to start somewhere. Every time we acknowledge that women deserve to be treated equally, every time we ensure that legislation is looked at through a gender lens that drills down to see whether it actually leads to equality – every time we do that – we go one step further to embedding respect in our society, to telling Victorians this matters: that women deserve to be respected in everything we do. There is nothing tokenistic about it.

I have worn those ‘Respect women’ earrings, and I have worn them with absolute pride. They send a message out. I have seen the look sometimes from people when they see me wearing them, and I think, ‘I hope that has made your brain think about it, and if it challenges you, then maybe there is something to think about there.’ If you find that you might recoil when you see a woman wearing ‘Respect women’ earrings – I am not accusing anyone of anything – I say, ‘Stop and ponder and think about your response to it and reflect.’ We all have inherent biases, but the first, initial response we have is maybe just the way we were raised or the images or messages we absorbed when we were younger. But that reflection – that is our evolution as human beings. That shows that we have learned and we are growing and we are getting better and hopefully dealing with things with more grace and compassion, because if we were all just a little bit kinder, all of us, this world would be a much better place. We would not see the terrible things that occur.

Once again I commend this bill to the house. I commend the minister, I commend the Treasurer and I commend all involved in it.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:16): I also rise to talk on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. Sitting in my office down below and then coming up into the chamber to listen to contributions from both sides, it is not very often that you get to speak after other people that have come before you, and I would like to point out the member for Mildura. What a gutsy effort to stand up in the chamber and speak about atrocities that have occurred over her life, baggage that she has had to carry personally for over 20 years now. To be able to stand up in the chamber under a little bit of adversity, to explain her life and what has happened in the most courageous way, I need her to know – and she does know, because we tell her all the time – that we have got her back. We will walk beside her when she needs us to walk beside her, we will support her, and we will walk behind her and carry her at times when she needs to be carried.

The member for Monbulk with her contribution just then, the same with you. It just shows that we sit here in the chamber on opposite sides and we do get a chance to dissect bills and there is a little bit of back-and-forth going across the chamber, but when push comes to shove we need to stand up as one to say how much we do respect women. I respect women on both sides, on my side in the coalition and on the Labor side, because it is a very, very hard thing for anybody to stand up, whether they be male or female, and talk about family violence that they have been through and perpetrators that most of the time get away. It is time for us to stand up and call it out, because the standard we walk past is

the standard that we will never, ever reach. We need to be able to call that out. I thank the member for Mildura for getting up and being able to talk about that today.

I do take offence, as she did, at the minister who was at the table, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. I know the minister is passionate; I do get it. I may not get it as much as women do that have been through it, but I do get that more needs to be done, and I do take it personally, as the member for Mildura does, when they say that we are not doing enough, because we get to debate this legislation that comes through but we also get to go back to our communities and we see it on the streets on a daily basis – mums with young kids coming into our offices that are at their wits' end because they cannot get the help that they need. They have gone through atrocities at home, they have packed up themselves and the kids and they are living in a car because they cannot live in the family home anymore. There is always more to be done. The fact is that they cannot get a roof over their head and they are having trouble accessing services, because as has been said by both sides of the chamber, the numbers are not going down; the numbers are going up of people that need to access these services. They are not only in metropolitan Melbourne but right around the state and especially in regional Victoria. The lists are long and the lists are growing. Yes, we can debate it in here, but what is the actual tangible outcome on the streets? We need to make sure there is adequate funding there, no matter what the issue is.

We are talking about the gender-responsive budgeting bill here today. It is great that we do have a lens that is going to look over the budget and taxes that are put forward by the government of the day to make sure that they are fair, they are equitable and they do not leave women behind, and that we make sure that we are all on a level playing field not only now but in the future when my daughter lives her life out. My daughter is 21 years old. She is at the stage where she is at work and living, and hopefully into the future she will get married and have kids.

While I have my time and I am able to stand up and debate bills in the chamber, I will talk about this and highlight it, because it is an issue. We all know it is an issue. Sometimes our passions, when we try to articulate them across the chamber, spill over. But we need to make sure that what we are making into law here and the amendments that we make do have tangible outcomes for the people on the street in the Latrobe Valley and the people on the street here in Melbourne and around regional Victoria. We know that domestic violence is an issue, and probably the opportunity today with the member for Mildura highlighting her circumstances allows us to stand up and talk about it. I am probably in a privileged situation with my upbringing in that I did not go through domestic violence with my family; I had a loving upbringing. But I certainly know people that have been through domestic violence either as a wife or partner or as a child growing up with it.

As I say, we need to make sure that we are doing everything we can. We turn to the budget, because in the budget – it was a very, very hard budget; we all get that – money has been pulled out of services which are absolutely critical to people that are living this life at the moment. During the 10-minute contribution I am making here there will be people that will experience domestic violence or partner abuse in that 10 minutes that I am standing up and talking, and that is wrong. That is extremely wrong. We need to make sure we are doing everything that we can. I think slashing funds from our health services and from our police – is that needed? We have got a Big Build on in Melbourne that everyone goes on about. Are our budget funds going to the right areas, or should they be coming in so we can actually prop up areas in policing, the courts and our health services, which people who are experiencing domestic violence are trying to access on a daily basis. I am sure that everybody in the chamber – I do not care what side they are on – has these people that come through their doors on their knees begging for help because they have exhausted every single avenue that they have to get help.

It is our job in here to debate these amendments, but we do need to know that the services that are required and are in high demand do have the financial backing behind them. I have some friends who are accessing IVF at the moment to start a loving family. There has been funding cut out of that. Talking to them the other day, it is nearly at the stage where they have got to take out half a house

mortgage to be able to navigate through the uncertainty and to pay money to have the luxury of starting a loving family. It just goes on.

We have delays after delays now, looking through the budget, in our mental health services. Down in the Latrobe Valley we are waiting for more access for people on the streets to the mental health part of the health industry that we need. It is ongoing, and it is not only in my patch in the Latrobe Valley, it is right around regional Victoria and also through the city. Our waitlists are going up. We need to do all we can to make sure that when we do get up to speak and we do debate bills that we debate them with the right purposes and not throw barbs at each other across the chamber, because we just do not know who is sitting in one of the chairs who is being impacted. I hope this bill works out as well as we expect.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (12:26): I rise today to speak on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. This is a really critical moment in our state's history. We were the first state to implement gender-responsive budgeting back in 2022, and now we will be the first to embed it into law. This bill will amend the Financial Management Act 1994 to secure gender-responsive budgeting into the future. It will make our government's expenditure more transparent and accountable and allow present and future governments to shape their policies and investments to improve gender equality. This will ensure fairer outcomes for Victorian women and girls and more programs targeted at boosting respect for all Victorians.

One of the ways we are already embedding gender-responsive budgeting is by continuing to fund Respectful Relationships in schools. This is a critical program, which those opposite have criticised time and time again but which is seeing phenomenal results across the state. I have seen it in action in classrooms across the Ripon electorate and with my own nephews at their local public primary school. It is teaching the next generation about how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence – things that are incredibly important to improving the safety and wellbeing of women and girls and that will ultimately help prevent violence into the future.

We began publishing an annual gender equality budget statement back in 2017 and made history with the passage of the Gender Equality Act 2020. That was a landmark step in breaking down discrimination and gender barriers in the workplace. This bill today is the next step and will complement all of our hard work to date. It will ensure that consideration of gender equality remains one of the key principles of sound financial management no matter what government is in power in the future. It will ensure that gender equality is considered at every single stage of the policy process.

This is an Australian first. It provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to influence culture, attitudes and outcomes for Victorian women and girls. No more clearly have we seen the need for more change than in the last few weeks across the Ballarat region and beyond. We have seen far too many women have been allegedly murdered at the hands of men. We are frankly sick of it, and our family violence service providers like Child and Family Services, Wrisc, the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Berry Street and Orange Door are working nonstop to support victim-survivors and their loved ones in our region. They are working with perpetrators as well through men's behaviour change programs to try and end that cycle. But they are calling out for more action, including more face-to-face outreach to victim-survivors in rural and remote areas; more funding for therapeutic counselling, including for children; increasing social housing in the Central Highlands region; and expanding community connection programs. We have come a long way in the 10 years since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, but there is still a long way to go in the fight towards equality, and it will require constant focus and persistence.

That is why I was so pleased to see last week's state budget continue that focus on building a fairer, more equal Victoria for women and girls. In this budget alone we have invested \$6.1 billion to advance gender equality in Victoria. This includes delivering \$657 million for health services, including addressing the pain gap in women's health; \$1.8 billion to increase women's economic security by supporting workers in women-dominated sectors and helping women to reskill and retrain;

\$292 million to assist with cost-of-living pressures that disproportionately affect women; \$29 million to deliver universal Aboriginal maternal and child health services to more families; \$129 million to continue to deliver the rollout of the fantastic three-year-old kinder program and to support families with free kinder for three- and four-year-olds; \$216 million to support Victorians experiencing homelessness into housing, including women; and \$269 million to prevent family violence and support women's safety, taking our overall spend to end violence to almost \$4 billion over the last 10 years, which is absolutely phenomenal.

These are critical funds that make a world of difference to so many Victorians, including across the Ripon electorate. In total more than 130 of our budget initiatives this year have been assessed as having a positive impact on gender equality. While those opposite continue to spread misinformation and fear about our state's finances, this side of the chamber is getting on with improving the health and wellbeing of women and girls, enhancing women's participation in the workforce, supporting more women and girls to participate in education and sport and making sure that they have the safety and security of a place to call home.

I am especially proud of our local budget investments that will strengthen gender equality and work towards ending violence across the Ripon electorate. This includes embedding a lawyer within the Maryborough Hospital and an allied health worker at the Maryborough Magistrates' Court through the incredible ARC Justice Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre to provide wraparound support to victim-survivors. We are also boosting funds to the Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service to offer legal aid to women at maternal and child health clinics and to provide early resolution of family law and family violence matters. We are delivering \$1.47 million to the One Red Tree Resource Centre in Ararat, which is funnelling provisional psychologists from Federation University into our rural schools to support more young people with their mental health needs. We are also delivering \$374,000 to McAuley House Ballarat to support women who are at risk of homelessness with a secure home, and we are delivering \$5.4 million for a new mental health, alcohol and other drug emergency department hub at the Ballarat Base Hospital, which will support many local women across our region. This is not to mention everything else we are doing. I cannot fit it all in a 10-minute speech. There is also delivering \$7.6 million for more community-based care to new mums in rural and regional areas through the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program; delivering \$47 million for the student health and wellbeing program within schools; delivering \$31 million to support people living with eating disorders, who are overwhelmingly young women and girls; and so much more.

All of us in this place had the opportunity to hear from the phenomenal Rosie Batty in Parliament yesterday. After her son Luke died from family violence 10 years ago she turned her grief into advocacy, and she was heard by this government. She reminded us yesterday that progress is not linear and that it takes long-term commitment and focus to make change. We are doing that here in Victoria because women and girls in this state deserve nothing less than a government that wants to end violence and see real action and real change to better their lives. From Landsborough to Lamplough, Ararat to Avoca, Bo Peep to Beaufort and Wedderburn to Waterloo, women across Ripon deserve to feel safe, secure and respected. They deserve that in their homes, on their farms, at their football-netball clubs, at local bars and restaurants, on public transport and everywhere in between. This bill will help do just that by keeping Victoria at the forefront of gender equality in Australia. It focuses on dignity, respect and fairness, and I am so proud to be a part of a government that is bringing this bill to the house today. I commend the bill to the house.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (12:35): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. This is just another great initiative of the Allan government. I have to say I know in my community they are really excited about this sort of legislation – legislation that actually shows that this government listens to women, which is really important in my community. As part of this budget we have introduced legislation to require that every budget in future includes a statement about gender equality. The Allan Labor government

made history with the passage of the Gender Equality Act in 2020. This was a landmark step in breaking down discrimination and gender barriers in the workplace. The new legislation will complement the Gender Equality Act 2020, allowing the Treasurer to request a gender impact assessment and ensure gender equality is given the priority it deserves.

I know in my community of Geelong when the Gender Equality Act was being developed many in my community were contributing to that consultation that occurred. There were many discussions in many forums, and there was great excitement about the possibility of actually having a Gender Equality Act. And here we are now having that gender-responsive budgeting bill in the chamber today. I know there will be many in my community that are very excited about that and the fact that both pieces of legislation are Australian firsts and both provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to influence policy, culture, attitudes and importantly outcomes for Victorian women and girls, which again is what my community is really excited about.

We know gender inequality negatively affects women and girls and continues to be a persistent challenge, with gender gaps affecting outcomes for Victorians, including in my community of Geelong. The Allan government knows that government has a key role to play to ensure gender impacts are considered through the funding process, which is one of our most powerful tools for effecting positive change. This is an important next step in the journey towards gender equality for all Victorians. Gender-responsive budgeting is fundamental to promoting gender equality through the way budgets are constructed and funds are collected and spent to ensure that better gender equality outcomes are achieved.

In Geelong we have had a very strong focus on gender equality. As I said, my community were very much involved in the Gender Equality Bill when it was being proposed at the time. But we also have things like the early parenting centre, which we know is for families but primarily impacts on women. In Geelong that centre is about to open, and again the excitement in my community is really strong that we are focused on so many areas that support women in our community, including the women's and children's hospital that has been committed to in Geelong. Construction is about to start. We had the very first Orange Door in Geelong, which was amazing, and the investment into family violence, as I said, is so much more than in other states, and Geelong was very proud to be able to have that first Orange Door and to set it up so that that model was able to be put out throughout the rest of the state.

Things like respectful behaviours in schools have been really welcomed in my community. Teachers, parents and children are actually saying how much of an impact that is having in their own local communities around their schools. The women's health clinics – we are getting one in Geelong, and again, women are really excited in my community because this is such a strong focus and we are having one of those clinics open up.

The mental health hub in Geelong soon to open will mean that people can walk in off the street and families can get the support they desperately need. My experience has been that in most families who are dealing with somebody in their household suffering from a mental illness, it is usually the mother or the sister – usually a woman – that is dealing with that situation and supporting that person with mental illness. They are the ones that contact me when they are seeking support and want to tell their stories and their experiences of how mental health has impacted on them and their family. It is very rare that I have a conversation with a man about that; it is primarily women. Same with the children's emergency department that is almost complete at Geelong. When I have been in the emergency department it is generally women who are there with their children, and this support is really significant because they will not have to go into the general ED, where we know it can be quite challenging for families and children. Having their own ED to go to will make a significant difference, and women will feel safer and more secure in that environment.

In the budget alone we have invested \$657 million for health services, including to address the pain gap in women's health. A pain inquiry is being undertaken and is being funded through this budget. Again, there is enormous support in my community for that. We saw that when we held the women's

pain forum in Geelong last week where we had 120 women come out. We had a long waiting list of women that wanted to attend but unfortunately missed out because of the capacity of the room we were in, so I know that this is really important to my community.

There is \$1.8 billion to increase women's economic security by supporting workers in women-dominated sectors and helping women to re-skill and retrain. Free TAFE – I mean, I see it all the time through my community. Free TAFE has opened up so many opportunities for women in my community to either retrain to go into a job, particularly where there are skills shortages. Women that have never had those opportunities and have not had that education can now see that they can enrol in TAFE and not have to pay the cost that they would have had to pay in the past which has prevented that. There are barriers up against women, we know that, but for women in my community they have been very clear that free TAFE has provided them with enormous opportunities to expand their opportunities careerwise and jobwise.

There is \$292 million to assist with cost-of-living pressures, which disproportionately affect women. Free kinder is now there in my community, and food relief – all those support services. I do not have time to go through all of them, but right across my community those support services are there. They are there to help to support families, but they are also there particularly for women to be able to put food on the table or to get an education and for their kids to get an education. These are really important factors for my community.

For those experiencing homelessness there is \$216 million in particular for supporting women. There is \$269 million to prevent family violence and support women's safety. As I said, we have got the first Orange Door in my community, which has been widely used, as we know. We will continue to support them. Female-friendly sports facilities right across my community have rolled out over a period of time. This is a great bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:44): I am really pleased to share some short remarks on the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. There are many people who wish to speak on this bill, and I am happy to enable that through making just a few points. Something in this bill which I think is really important is the transparency that it enables. We heard from those opposite the repeated question: where is the investment? Through the work of this government we are increasing the transparency about the investment through the gender equality budget statement, which is included with every budget prepared by this government, because we know that if it is measured it matters. Where you can have formulated and presented on paper what is actually being done, you allow civil society to interrogate the actions of government and to truly understand where the investment is. That is something that this government has done for a number of years and will continue to do. Similarly, gender impact statements, which can be requested by the Treasurer, also ensure that we are interrogating the impact of the work and how each item funded is appropriately considering gender.

That is something that this government do naturally because we are a government that is made up of men and women and because of that we are able to more accurately reflect the Victorian community in our decision-making, in our policies and in our projects. I think we have heard some of those covered here this afternoon, including free kinder, women's pain and also women's participation in sport. There are some really simple things. Women have different views on or a different experience of footpaths and lighting, so when we talk about women's safety and women's comfort in the community when designing active transport, the needs and priorities of women need to be considered as well, and that is the type of thing that our government does. We are not just doing it in an ad hoc manner, we are structurally and systematically embedding these approaches in what we do and in what the departments do in support of our ministers. That is why we are all really proud to stand up and speak to this bill.

I mentioned free kinder before, and that is something that I know people on this side of the chamber are incredibly proud of our government introducing. This is a policy that is good for children, is good

for women, is good for families and is good for the economy. We are not talking about things that just suit women or that are just good for women. We know that when women are supported to achieve all that they want and to follow their potential the whole community benefits. It is not about women wanting more, more, more; it is about equality, it is about equality of participation and it is about equality of outcome. So it is somewhat disingenuous to say, as we have heard from those opposite today, ‘What about men?’ Well, I would refer people who are worried about budgeting for men to 99 per cent of other jurisdictions or the history of government budgets across Australia more generally. I do not think conversations asking ‘What about men?’ are very helpful in this space, because we know that when women benefit everyone benefits.

I will just touch briefly, since we have the Minister for Community Sport here, on women’s participation in sport and what our government has done on that. Women want to play sport. There is a belief, which is wrong, that girls stop wanting to play sport. There are barriers that stop girls playing sport. That is the truth. We recognise that it is the barriers that are stopping young women, and that is why we have set about removing the barriers. It is the thoughtful approach of a government that has female ministers and female MPs and that understands and supports approaches which consider things like the colour of sports uniforms and what a difference it makes for girls not to have to wear white sports shorts and the impact that has. From the very practical right through to the transparency that is set out in the budget, from go to whoa this government is implementing gender-responsive policies and gender-responsive budgeting. I commend the bill to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (12:50): I rise to support the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024. I am pleased to be standing in a place that is at the forefront of gender equality in Australia, with the member for Mulgrave bringing gender equality to this place for the first time ever. Before that Labor achieved equality in the caucus and a female majority in cabinet.

Gender-responsive budgeting was first introduced into the budget in 2021, building from the publication of gender equality budget statements since the 2017–18 budget. The gender equality budget statement is used to analyse and consider the impact of investment decisions on women at every stage of the budget process. It considers the ways in which the decisions that are made affect people differently, women in particular. GRB is a tool to identify budget measures that will close gender gaps and advance gender equality objectives. It is a way to create budgets that consider the impact of investment decisions on all Victorians to prioritise fairness and equity with every dollar spent. It also allows us to gain better insights, provide for better outcomes and share resources more fairly to address inequalities.

This bill will also amend Victoria’s primary financial management legislation, the Financial Management Act 1994, to ensure that consideration of gender equality remains one of the key principles of sound financial management going forward. Victoria has been a leader in gender equality in Australia under the Labor government. We can boast a long timeline of gender equality reforms, including the landmark Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2016, which found that we need to address gender inequality to reduce family violence and all forms of violence and abuse against women.

2016 saw the release of Safe and Strong, the inaugural gender equality statement, which put gender equality at the centre of decision-making in the public sector. 2017 saw the inaugural gender equality budget statement, now released every year and at the centre of this bill. In 2018 Respect Victoria was established as the first dedicated agency in Australia for primary prevention of all forms of family violence and abuse against women. I commend their work, the support they have provided to Victorians and their tireless pursuit to change the culture that allows family violence to happen in the first place. The Gender Equality Act 2020 was introduced to improve workplace gender equality in the Victorian public sector, universities and local councils. It contains a requirement to ensure that gender is considered as part of key revenue and expenditure decisions. 2021 saw the gender-responsive budgeting unit established, the first of its kind in Australia. It was also the year the independent inquiry

into economic equity for Victorian women was established. It developed recommendations for government to progress economic equity for all Victorian women.

A key milestone in the reform of Victoria's nation-leading family violence policy was achieved when all 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence were implemented. I was proud to be at that announcement of this acquittal at the Orange Door in Broadmeadows with the then Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. It was also great to recently visit Orange Door Broadmeadows with the current minister and to be at the opening of this facility with the second Minister for Prevention of Family Violence in Victoria. Our cabinet has such depth of knowledge of family violence and its drivers, and our gender-responsive budgeting has helped to fund all the services we need to address this scourge in society. I commend the support the Orange Door network has provided since its rollout.

Victoria's gender equality statement, strategy and action plan were released in 2023 by the Allan Labor government, and it was exciting to be at its launch with the hardworking Minister for Women. This measurable strategy builds on the previous work to drive gender equality in Victoria. It has identified 110 actions through five key focus areas.

But despite our proud record and its extensive list of reforms, we know there is still much to do. In 2021, 23 per cent of women reported having experienced violence by an intimate partner after the age of 15, up from 17 per cent five years earlier. This figure compares with 7.3 per cent of men. Women and girls are disproportionately victims of family violence. One-in-three women over the age of 15 has experienced physical violence, and a 2018 national survey revealed that 39 per cent of Australian women had experienced sexual harassment at work in the previous five years, compared to 26 per cent of men.

We should all be safe from harassment, violence and abuse, at home, at work and in the street. The Allan Labor government's budget is investing in an additional \$269 million to prevent family violence and support women's safety initiatives in prevention, support, early education and information sharing between authorities. The continued \$39 million investment of the Respectful Relationships program ensures education in gender equality and respect starts at childhood. Rigid stereotypes of gender norms and masculinity play a direct role in men's violence against women and gender-diverse people. By engaging students, teachers and carers in understanding how gendered norms affect people's attitudes it in turn influences their behaviour and gets them to question harmful attitudes and understand the effect that these can have on others. All people should be treated with dignity and respect, particularly in their homes and by the people who love them, and helping young children benefit from knowing what respectful relationships look like helps them have fulfilling and mutually respectful relationships in the future.

I was really proud to attend the celebration of young people graduating from the Good People Act Now program at Banksia Gardens Community Services. It was so heartening in particular to hear the young men talk about how their perspectives had significantly changed after hearing the stories of women in the room – stories of limitations and unfortunately some stories of fear, abuse, coercive control and violence. Sharing stories in safe places always helps broaden perspectives, and walking in another's shoes helps build empathy and can be the catalyst for change. Our young change-makers and active bystanders are changing attitudes and making the world a kinder and safer place. I thank GPAN for the pioneering work they do, and our gender-responsive budgeting ensures that they can continue to do this work. Unfortunately the City of Hume consistently records some of the highest rates of violence against women in metro Melbourne compared to other local government areas. In 2020 it ranked second. GPAN was established in response to these alarming statistics and since 2014 has trained hundreds of young people to be gender equity champions and active bystanders in their communities.

Women continue to face segregation in Australia's labour market. Stereotypes of male and female careers are still influencing students; for example, women are often less likely to work or study in

STEM after leaving school, which is reflected in low rates of women in trades and technical roles. This budget invests \$1.8 billion to increase women's economic security by supporting workers in female-dominated sectors and helping women to reskill and retrain. Seventy per cent of workers in the education sector and 80 per cent in the healthcare sector are women, and this budget is creating better workplaces and investing in retaining our most important workers, who have historically been underappreciated.

We are investing \$755 million to improve our hospitals and operate expanded services and \$109 million to support our hardworking paramedics and nurses by improving patient flow in emergency care and supporting paramedics on the road. And for our teachers we are investing \$80 million to expand the workforce and support flexible working for teachers and an additional \$64 million to support the mental health and wellbeing of our teachers as they educate the minds of the future.

Labor is also investing \$394 million to deliver vocational education and training, including free TAFE, which removes tuition fees for students and provides opportunities for women, including women returning to work. I am so proud of Labor's investment in the \$60 million Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute. It was very exciting to visit recently with Minister Tierney and see the incredible progress. As part of the rollout of our nation-leading and life-changing free kinder and Labor's record investment in early education and care, building these workforces is critical. The Kangan Institute will upskill locals to take on these rewarding jobs, and our huge investment will deliver state-of-the-art lavatories and high-quality flexible learning spaces that are the pride and joy of Broadmeadows. A further \$38 million will improve students' access to VET through their schools. This includes a new VET taster program, which will provide access to a variety of short courses and the experience of studying in a TAFE. With my daughter having recently completed her year 10 week of work experience at a local school, having a small taste of an industry without having to fully commit can be crucial in deciding your career for the future. It can either ignite the spark to pursue it further or save time and money if it is not what you imagined it to be.

Much research has shown that being active improves mental health and physical health. Participation levels in sport have long shown boys are more active than girls, and I am pleased to say many steps have been taken to change these statistics. I was part of the 2010 introduction of Moreland – now Merri-bek – City Council's groundbreaking sportsground and pavilions allocation policy, and I would like to thank former councillors Alice Pryor and Jo Connellan, who supported that policy, and other councillors at the time – Enver Erdogan too. The policy requested that clubs be inclusive of women, juniors, people with a disability and people from culturally diverse backgrounds or risk losing allocation of their ground. Merri-bek was the first council in Victoria to attempt to achieve this outcome through the policy, and the response proved to be exceptional, with female participation nearly doubling within the first two years alone. It has paved the way for Australia's *Fair Access Policy Roadmap*, which was launched in Victoria in 2022. The Allan Labor government are further investing in girls' and women's sport with the Change Our Game grants program to inspire even more women and girls to take part, as well as the extension of the eighth round of the Get Active Kids program opening in spring 2024.

Women report severe levels of pain more often and for longer durations. Despite this, women often receive less treatment for pain than men. From chronic pain, period-related conditions, endometriosis, menopause, pregnancy and birth complications, the list goes on. Thankfully these issues are being acknowledged as normal now, with a \$657 million investment into the health services, including addressing the pain gap in women's health. Gender equality grows and intersects with ageism, with older women experiencing it at a higher rate. I support the bill.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:03 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the gallery delegates from the Fiji Parliament. Members and staff are visiting us this week principally to observe the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's budget hearings, as well as meeting with members and staff on a range of topics. We welcome the delegates here and express our support for the twinning relationship with the Fiji Parliament under the Pacific parliamentary program. Welcome.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. Last night the federal budget confirmed the Suburban Rail Loop has no further Commonwealth funding. Will the state government now fund the balance for the Suburban Rail Loop East?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to once again talk about the Suburban Rail Loop, how Victorians have voted for this project not once but twice, how we have a partner in Canberra who has provided \$2.2 billion for the funding and how we are getting on and delivering this project. In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question and talking about the Suburban Rail Loop, he does of course reference last night's federal budget, and wasn't it great in last night's federal budget to see a federal government that knows where Victoria is on the map and that recognises that Victorians are federal taxpayers as well and that we have –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: You asked about the federal budget, Leader of the Opposition.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, it has been nearly a minute. I have allowed the Premier a good deal of time. It is a very simple question. Can I ask that you draw the Premier back to the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being directly responsive to the question that was put to her. She was talking about the Suburban Rail Loop, she was talking about the federal government and she was talking about the fact that we now have a partner in Canberra that knows where Victoria is.

The SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said, it was great to see that we have received support. The minister for freight would be keen for me to remind the house of that investment for the Maroona freight line. That was another great example – a project we had been advocating for year after year – to see a federal Labor government make this investment.

When it comes to the Suburban Rail Loop, it is very interesting. It is always interesting to get a question from the opposition on the Suburban Rail Loop, because this is of course a project that they oppose. They have opposed it for years. They have opposed it in the face of the fact that Victorians have voted for this twice.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am very pleased to get an interjection about the business case, because in August 2021 we released a comprehensive business and investment case that demonstrates that this project more than stacks up. And it was in fact –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to Speaker Maddigan's ruling of 2003, which was:

When responding to a question a minister must address the question rather than responding generally.

I put to you that the Premier has a pattern of behaviour of responding generally rather than responding specifically to the question. The question related to funding of the project; that was the question. It was not about anything else. It was not about a general response. I put to you, Speaker, that the Premier is responding generally rather than to the specific question.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business knows that I cannot direct a minister or the Premier how to respond to a question. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: We have released that business and investment case, which shows that it is going to take hundreds of thousands of cars off local roads and will provide for a 22-minute journey between Cheltenham and Box Hill. There are so many benefits that this project would bring, including delivering a train line to the largest university in the country that is currently not served by a train line.

When it came to last night's federal budget, as I said, we have received support for a range of projects. In terms of the Suburban Rail Loop, the Suburban Rail Loop has already received \$2.2 billion in funding from the federal government, and we will continue to work with the federal government on this project. I note that the federal Treasurer has made some comments today about the Suburban Rail Loop. He said he wanted to ensure he was supporting projects that had value for money. When it comes to value for money, this is a project, as our business and investment case shows, that absolutely stacks up. It absolutely stacks up. We were at the Metro Tunnel this morning – a project that those opposite opposed again and again. The Suburban Rail Loop is another project that will be delivered only by Labor governments.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): The minister has previously said that funding for this –

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: The minister for infrastructure projects, transport –

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: Minister Pearson has previously said that funding for the Suburban Rail Loop East will come from three sources: 'the Commonwealth, value capture and contributions from the state'. How much will Victorians now have to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop East?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): I am pleased to see that the Leader of the Opposition has been listening to what Minister Pearson and I have been saying for a number of years, and I would also point the Leader of the Opposition to page 187 of BP4. The Leader of the Opposition asked about the cost of the Suburban Rail Loop East, and budget paper 4 on page 187, as it has in previous editions, states that it is expected to cost between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion. I can hand him my highlighted version if he likes. The budget has been out for a week, and it takes question time for me to help the Leader of the Opposition to read the budget papers on how much the Suburban Rail Loop is expected to cost.

The SPEAKER: I remind members about the use of props, even though it is a document and it is the budget paper.

Ministers statements: motor neurone disease

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): It is a privilege today to rise and speak on how we are all continuing to support the fight against motor neurone disease. This morning I was proud to join with everyone in the chamber here today as we donned our blue beanies and joined the mighty Neale Daniher, his family and his Big Freeze. This year the Big Freeze turns 10 – 10 years, a remarkable achievement – and even more importantly, because of Neale, his family and their work, Australia is a world leader in MND research, with new clinical trials, new drug development and early identification. And today I am very proud to say that our government is continuing to support that work with \$250,000 for FightMND.

For all of us this fight has taken on recently an even more personal aspect, and I mean of course our wonderful, incredible and dear friend the member for Pakenham Emma Vulin. There is no-one who loves her community more or indeed works harder than the member for Pakenham. Earlier this year the member for Pakenham was incredibly brave as she shared with us, the public and her community her diagnosis, and we have seen that bravery again in action today in the chamber. Like more than 2000 Australians and their families, the member for Pakenham is in her own personal battle with the beast. I want to take a moment to refer to the member for Pakenham's first words in this place when she was elected. She said to her community, 'I hope I do you proud and fight when I need to fight.' Emma, you have absolutely delivered – sorry, the member for Pakenham has delivered – the first one in spades. Your community is so proud of you, of what you have delivered for your community and of what you have already achieved. On the second, as you continue to fight for your community and continue that representation as the strong, proud member for Pakenham, we will be with you for your fight every single day.

Economic policy

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:13): My question is to the Treasurer. Yesterday the Treasurer described a debt cap as a ludicrous piece of public policy. Prior to the 2018 election, the Treasurer had a longstanding commitment to a debt cap of 6 per cent of GSP, so why did the Treasurer abandon the budgetary discipline of any debt cap?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:13): I thank the member for his question. I make the point that debt caps as they are commonly understood, and if you look at the US example, are legislated and they are a brick wall beyond which you cannot move, as opposed to targets that the government set for itself prior to the onset of a century-changing pandemic. We had the flexibility because we had not locked ourselves into a debt cap. We had set a debt target, which, as was quite clear and obvious, had to change or would compromise the wellbeing of the Victorian community. We know exactly where those opposite would go. They would rate their debt cap and their budget above the wellbeing and the interests of the Victorian community. We just have a difference of opinion in this respect.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Tim PALLAS: The one thing that those opposite need to come clean on with the Victorian people, if we are going to have a debate around debt caps, is exactly where they would set that debt cap. It is a bit like a nuclear reactor: where would you put it? Where you put the level on your debt cap basically constrains you and your capacity to service the needs of the Victorian people when events are beyond your control. Those opposite might like to think that they can control the way the international economy operates or the geopolitical circumstances that this state and its people can be subject to. We are not quite so arrogant in this place. We recognise that as a government we have one job and one job alone, and that is to preserve and assert the wellbeing of the Victorian people and to grow the Victorian economy as and when we can and to make sure that debt is managed responsibly.

John Pesutto interjected.

Tim PALLAS: 'How's it going?' says the Leader of the Opposition. I thank him for the interjection. How is our debt position going? It is going quite well because effectively, as a government, we have grown the economy. In growing the economy, in growing jobs, in growing prosperity, we as a community are capable of managing the material challenges that confront Victorians. We are seeing debt as a percentage of the state's economy reducing.

Those opposite have a very clear view. Their idea of how to manage debt is to be cowed by it and to cut and put calamitous circumstances upon the Victorian people. That is not our approach. We will

grow the economy. Our economy at the moment is \$600 billion. By the end of the forward estimates, it will be three-quarters of a trillion. Our capacity to service debt will improve.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Frankston, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:17): I am happy to debate the Treasurer any time, any place. In 2019 the Treasurer said that:

... our commitment to the Victorian people that debt will not exceed 12 per cent of GSP will be honoured.

Can the Treasurer confirm that net debt will reach 25.2 per cent of GSP in just two years?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:17): Yes, and I can confirm for the member for Sandringham there was a global pandemic that laid waste to economies around the planet. And might I also confirm to the member for Sandringham that, were they ever to get the inglorious opportunity to govern in this state as they propose to do, they would effectively sacrifice the wellbeing of the Victorian people in the doctrinaire pursuit of a debt cap. Let us ring that loud to every Victorian that their priorities are not Victorians' priorities and that their intention is to lay waste to the Victorian economy and the Victorian people.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast is warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:18): I rise to update the house on how the Big Build is connecting Victorians to the things that matter to them. We are getting on with building the Metro Tunnel project, linking the Sunbury, Cranbourne and Pakenham lines through five new underground stations.

This morning I was delighted to join the Premier at the brand new Parkville station, located 32 metres below Grattan Street at the doorstep of our world-class health, research and education precinct. Major construction at Parkville station is now complete, thanks to the hundreds of workers who have built the station over the past six years. Parkville station will absolutely transform travel for the thousands of healthcare workers, patients and students who commute to the precinct every single day, giving them a seamless connection to the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, the University of Melbourne and much, much more. That is two stations down; we have got three to go. Whether you are a nurse or a patient accessing our leading hospitals, a student at university or a worker travelling to one of our many important precincts, the Metro Tunnel will provide you with better, easier and more convenient connections.

I am reminded of those on the other side who were in government when their leader said that the Metro Tunnel would be disastrous for Melbourne. Others called it a hoax. We know that to make the Metro Tunnel a success we must make critical investments to modernise all our lines, and that is why we are making the Cranbourne, Pakenham and Sunbury lines level crossing free by 2025, slashing congestion in the outer suburbs and seamlessly connecting people to the Metro Tunnel. Last month I was delighted to join the terrific member for Pakenham when we visited the removal of the 76th level crossing, at Brunt Road. Seventy-six boom gates are gone for good, and we are on track to remove 110 by 2030. Victoria's Big Build is connecting Victorians to the places where they want to go. While those opposite

make up excuses for why we should not build infrastructure, we are getting on and delivering it for the community.

School saving bonus

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:21): My question is to the Minister for Education. St Mary's school is a low-fee Catholic primary school in Whittlesea. While 60 per cent of students come from disadvantaged families, only 7 per cent of students will be eligible for the government's \$400 payment. Why don't all disadvantaged students at St Mary's school deserve help?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:21): The shadow minister quoted 60 per cent of kids at St Mary's as having disadvantaged backgrounds. Can I tell you what the stat is in our public school system? Ninety-two per cent of kids with disadvantaged backgrounds attend state government schools. This government stands with them and their families, and we are putting our funding to the most important and needy kids in our community – that is, kids that attend our state schools. That is why we are the Education State, and that is why we are getting on with the job and making sure every person –

John Pesutto interjected.

Ben CARROLL: including in your electorate – gets funding, because they deserve it. We will stand with our communities, we will stand with our young children and we will make sure that they get all the funding they deserve.

Let me just go through the stats too. Our government funds 80 per cent of our state schools. The Commonwealth government funds 80 per cent of the independent, non-government school sector. I have not heard one comment from the shadow minister on the National School Reform Agreement defending and trying to get a better deal from Canberra for our state schools.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:22): Yesterday in the house the minister said that the \$400 school payment is going where it needs to go. Why do Labor ministers who earn over \$365,000 need this payment and disadvantaged students at St Mary's school in Whittlesea do not?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:23): I thank the shadow minister for her question, and I refer her to my answer yesterday as well. We have worked very closely with our education stakeholders, we have worked very closely with our school principals right across the state and we have worked very closely with our business managers, and they are very clear that this money, on top of the money we are also funding through State Schools' Relief, is going to our most needy families and our most needy students.

Ministers statements: community food relief

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:24): It is a privilege to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to supporting community food relief right across Victoria. With the cost of living continuing to put pressure on households, we know that the food relief sector is experiencing unprecedented demand. That is why we are investing an additional \$6 million into food relief in the 2024–25 state budget, building on our investment of more than \$56 million since 2020 to deliver food to Victorians in need.

Last week I was pleased to visit Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House to see the great work they are doing to provide food relief and to announce the \$2.5 million grants package we are delivering to neighbourhood houses that provide food relief. We know that neighbourhood houses provide a wide range of critical services, and this funding will enable them to continue to distribute food across their local communities.

Our government is also providing further support to boost the provision of food relief in the regions. As the members for Lara, Geelong and Bellarine will be pleased to hear, we are investing \$1.5 million

into the state's six regional food relief hubs so that they can continue their essential work of helping regional Victorians when and where they need it most.

Finally, through this budget we are investing \$1 million in a competitive grants program for statewide food relief providers and a further \$1 million in a grants program for community and volunteer led organisations to strengthen food relief initiatives across the sector, because this government is committed to supporting access to food relief for those in need and this investment will do just that. I thank all involved for providing food relief services right across our state.

Rental support

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:25): My question is to the Premier. These are the words of Freya, a Victorian renter: 'I got a room to rent, after couch surfing for six months – half a year, apologising to friends, living out of a bag. Now I'm terrified for the next rent increase. What if one bad thing happens and I can't work? I have a good job, but more than half my pay goes to rent. Every day, most of the day, I think about money. I can't go to the doctor. I can't turn the heater on. I eat from the "kids eat free" basket from the supermarket. Yesterday I had to steal tampons. My rent is sucking the life out of me.' Premier, there was nothing in the budget for renters again this year. Why is Labor pretending that renters do not exist?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Transport Infrastructure is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I thank the member for Richmond for her question because it gives me the opportunity through this question to say to Freya and all renters, who are being told a hot mess of disingenuity by the member for Richmond and her colleagues, how we are actively supporting renters in this state. The first thing I would say to the member for Richmond, if she is so committed to supporting people like Freya – because we know there are many particularly young Victorians who are feeling rental stress – is that it all starts with supply. The key way to support more people to have the dignity of a roof over their head, whether it is being able to afford to buy their own home or choose to access a rental property, is to build more properties, so why do the Greens continue to team up with the Liberal Party and oppose the construction of more properties? That is the key question that the member for Richmond should be considering as she stands here and asks questions about renters and their rights and support. We have seen, whether it is in the city halls in councils around the inner city or indeed in state Parliament, that too many times the Greens have not walked the talk and supported more homes being built across the state.

We are taking a very different approach. We are doing everything we can in terms of building more homes, because the key way to address supply is to build more homes. Just last Monday the planning minister and I were in Docklands to announce that approval had been provided for another build-to-rent project that will support 925 new build-to-rent properties. Of course Melbourne is the build-to-rent capital of the nation thanks to the work the Treasurer has been doing to ensure that we have the incentives in the right place to be able to attract this sort of investment into the build-to-rent market.

We acknowledge too that renters are facing rental stress, which is why just a week ago the Minister for Consumer Affairs announced a rental stress assistance package – announced additional assistance to provide support to renters, which is also, I am advised, in the budget papers. Then last night we saw the federal Labor government extend their support to renters as well.

We will continue to be hardworking and up-front with renters about how we will support them, and I would hope that the Greens political party would stop their campaign of misinformation and get on and do their job and support us in building more homes for more renters.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:30): I thank the Premier for her answer, but this is coming from a government that has demolished more public housing than it has built and refused to free up the 48,000 Victorian homes that are currently on Airbnb. This government's policies for landlords and

developers are putting 82 per cent of renters in this kind of extreme stress, and if Labor had frozen rents when the Greens asked them to, renters like Freya would have saved \$2500, enough to at least turn the heaters on. This is not some Greens fantasy. Around the world, governments have introduced rent controls to stop landlords pushing renters to the point where they are stealing food or sleeping on couches or staying in abusive relationships. Premier, what will it take for Labor to stop unlimited rent increases?

Members interjecting.

Jacinta Allan: I did not hear the question. I am happy to hear it again.

The SPEAKER: Could the member for Richmond repeat just the question.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: In silence?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. Member for Bentleigh!

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The question is: what will it take for Labor to stop unlimited rent increases?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:31): I know the member for Richmond knows this, because this question has been asked previously in the chamber. There is evidence here and around the world that the sort of measure the member for Richmond is asking for does not work. It does not address supply, it does not address the maintenance needs of rental properties and it does not increase the number of homes available for renting. The Greens political party are very keen to provide advice to the rest of us about taking an evidence-based approach to a whole range of policy matters, so my question to the member Richmond –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: In silence? I thought we were showing a level of respect here in the chamber. I would have thought that on this the Greens political party would hold themselves to the standard they expect everyone else to be held to and take an evidence-based approach to public policy. We are increasing supply and we are supporting renters in stress, and that is the path we will continue on.

Ministers statements: family violence

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:33): When women are not safe, they are not healthy. Women have the right to be healthy and safe everywhere, especially in the sanctuary of their homes. An Australian woman has lost her life due to violence every four days this year. The violence has to stop. Rosie Batty spoke yesterday about her book *Hope* and her journey over the last 10 years since the murder of her son Luke, murdered by his father, the person Rosie has said loved Luke more than anyone. Rosie reminded us:

Family violence happens to everybody, no matter how nice your house is or how intelligent you are.

Rosie also spoke with pride of the work of this government since the royal commission, a nearly \$4 billion investment, work this government continues to do with the \$211 million invested in this budget. We are also investing more than \$18 million to support the critical work of women's health services to prevent and identify family violence and help women access the support they need. At the grassroots is where good, important work can be done, and our women's health services are exceptionally good at working with communities to make a difference to people's lives.

For generations family violence was not considered a problem. It was seen as a woman's problem, a problem people did not talk about. There was a lot of victim blaming. Our royal commission, the first in the nation, shone the brightest light on the horror of family violence. This government is investing in this work every single day. We know that every person in the state has a role to play in driving down family violence and creating a state where we have respect and equality. We all have a role to play in prevention, including the Allan Labor government, and we are committed to preventing family violence before it starts so that all Victorians can be safe, healthy and free from violence.

Jade Benham: On a point of order, Speaker –

The SPEAKER: I am sorry, member for Mildura, we are in the middle of question time. It is not the time to raise a point of order. I am happy to take the point of order after question time.

John Pesutto: Further on the point of order, Speaker, the member for Mildura was not even heard.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura will be heard after question time. I will allow the point of order after question time.

John Pesutto: Speaker, may I ask, are you aware of the point of order that she was going to make?

The SPEAKER: No, I am not aware of the point. You are not to ask me questions, Leader of the Opposition. We are in the middle of question time. We will continue with question time. The member for Mildura may raise a point of order at the end of question time.

Energy policy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:36): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Yesterday the minister boldly declared that the only ban on gas in Victoria is a ban on fracking. On 1 January this year the government gazetted an amendment that changes 'all planning schemes in Victoria by prohibiting new gas connections for new dwellings'. Did the minister mislead the house about Labor's gas ban?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:36): I thank the member for the question. I think the member, with the question that is being put, likes to cut the question in different ways depending on his audience. The reality is this: when those opposite talk about whether there are bans in Victoria on gas, it is about the production and it is about the exploration. It is about the production of gas. I have been very clear and this side of the house has been very clear that there is no ban on exploration or extraction of gas onshore in Victoria or indeed within state waters, and indeed there are a number of licences that are active in state waters and onshore for the exploration and extraction of gas. The problem is very little can be found. That is the situation we are in.

Members interjecting.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: Unless you want to start fracking. Excuse me for thinking that those opposite once upon a time actually voted with this government to ban fracking. If they have got other desires, then they should be honest with the Victorian public, be honest with the farmers, be honest with those people who care for the environment, that their intention is to frack for gas. They should be honest with Victorians and stop hiding behind the pretence that somehow there is a ban on gas in Victoria.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has started debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:38): In April the minister said:

Sometimes I think you need to say what it actually means about substituting out ... fossil gas ...

Minister, what does Labor's gas ban in new homes actually mean for gas plumbers and gas retailers?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:38): I thank the member for the supplementary question. There is no secret here that when you have a declining resource, such as we do with gas, quite evidenced by the lead scientist, by AEMO, by the ACCC, there are courses of action that responsible governments, on behalf of their communities, need to take, and that is to conserve the declining resource for those parts of our economy that rely on it and cannot substitute out for other types of energy sources or fuels. That is what that is. Those opposite would like to pretend that this is not happening. The reality is this: the production of gas in Victoria is declining – declining at a sharper rate than the demand for gas. Those two things unabated cannot be sustained, and that is why we actually have a policy – *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: business support

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:40): I am pleased to advise the house of the current situation in business creation and investment in the state of Victoria. You could almost believe, if you listened to the ill-informed commentary that seems to pervade those sides of this chamber, that business was going backwards. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Victoria we lead the nation in business investment growth. This was 13 per cent in Victoria last year, compared to 6 per cent for the rest of the nation. There were more startups in this state than in any other location, with 3400 of them compared to when we started in 2017 with the advent of LaunchVic. The most recent ABS stats demonstrate that we have 90,000 more businesses in Victoria now than we had at the start of 2021. That is more businesses created than in any other state. Little wonder, then, that this state has created more jobs than any other state since September 2020.

We have cut the payroll tax rate for regional businesses to one-quarter of the metro rate. We have undertaken landmark reform to abolish stamp duty on commercial and industrial property, and we are raising the payroll tax free threshold to \$1 million so that 6000 small businesses no longer have to pay a cent of payroll tax, which, incidentally, those opposite voted against. The truth is that this government has put in place the conditions to ensure that 170,000 more businesses in this state can grow and we can ensure that those opposite – 170,000 businesses created by this government, but in their four years in government 11,000 businesses – *(Time expired)*

Jade Benham: On a point of order, Speaker, during debate earlier today the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, the member for Eltham, who I note is also not in the chamber now, made some comments that were extraordinarily inflammatory to me, to other members in this place, no doubt, and to other victims of family violence, notably:

Now, for those opposite, who barely come to an election with a family violence policy and who are barely able to articulate the ins and outs of family violence, to come into this place and lecture us and tell us that we are cutting when we are not is absolutely shameful and is disrespectful.

I will tell you what is disrespectful: in the last couple of weeks I have found my voice. I have been very public with my experience, giving voice to those who have not had a voice. For the minister to not be able to look me in the eye and also to walk out of the chamber while I was responding I find personally offensive, and now doing it again I find personally offensive. I seek an unreserved apology to me and to other victims and survivors of family violence.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Mildura. I will need to review the transcript and come back to the house on that matter.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I raise for the Speaker's attention that questions 531 and 413 are two questions that are still outstanding that I asked the Speaker to ask the Minister for Health and the Minister for Environment to respond to back in March. I once again ask you, Speaker, if you will follow that up for me. I would also like to bring to the Speaker's attention that question 521 is outstanding as well, please.

The SPEAKER: Hand the list to the clerks, please, member for South-West Coast.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, I have got an unanswered question, 548, for the Minister for Children in regard to Waterfall Gully kindergarten. If you could have that looked at, that would be appreciated.

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Speaker, I would like to bring to the house's attention constituency questions 484 and 568 and questions on notice 1124, 1126 and 1127. They are overdue for answers. I would ask for you to please help follow them up.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:45): I have reviewed the constituency questions from 7 and 14 May 2024. On 7 May the member for Gippsland South asked the minister for a progress update on a bypass. *Rulings from the Chair* notes that asking for an update is an action, and I therefore rule the constituency question by the member for Gippsland South out of order. On 7 May the member for Mornington asked the Premier a question related to policy in Victoria generally that was not directly related to the member's constituents or electorate. *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, states that constituency questions must relate to constituency issues and not encompass broader policy issues. I therefore rule the member for Mornington's constituency question out of order. Yesterday the member for Melbourne asked the Minister for Consumer Affairs a question that was also related to policy in Victoria generally and not directly related to the member's constituents or electorate. I therefore rule the member for Melbourne's constituency question out of order.

Constituency questions

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:46): (640) My constituency question is for the minister for roads. Does your department liaise with other departments and list the upcoming major projects and put thought into spacing them out to reduce the traffic congestion and disruption to the public? In and around my electorate of Croydon there is a massive logistical nightmare with the closure of Coolstore Road due to level crossing works and the closure of Bayswater Road and Mount Dandenong Road due to Melbourne Water pipeline replacement, and on top of that there is the redevelopment of the Montrose roundabout, which is being managed by the state government. People are not against these projects; rather they cannot understand why they all must be done in the one area at the same time, causing disruption, congestion, long delays and massive inconvenience. Surely there is a better way to plan and manage these projects. Just today I learned that Kent Avenue in Croydon will be closed when I had a call from the local butcher, who cannot understand why adequate notice was not given when they have got supplies of meat that they are trying to sell and was asking questions like how do they trade when they are ill-advised of road closures.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:47): (641) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Thanks to a \$13.1 million investment by the Allan Labor government I am delighted that the Greenvale community will benefit from a huge upgrade to bus services, particularly bus route 543. This investment will mean that the 543 service, which currently runs from Roxburgh Park station to Greenvale West, will be extended to Craigieburn Central, connecting communities in Greenvale North to public transport for the first time. This investment will ensure that residents across Greenvale, particularly the Greenvale Gardens, Aspect and Providence estates, who have been passionate advocates for this project, will have access to better public transport closer to home. Filling in this kind of public transport gap is exactly the kind of productivity investment and reform I spoke about in my first contribution here, but to enable me to keep my community updated,

could the minister please inform me how the Allan Labor government's continued investment in growing communities is making it easier for families in Greenvale to access public transport?

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:48): (642) My question is for the Minister for Health, and I ask: what is this government's plan to improve the oral health of communities like Heathcote that do not have a fluoridated water supply? Nine of out 10 Australians have access to fluoridated water; however, too many children living in Heathcote communities suffer poor dental health because of a lack of state government action. Heathcote is the largest community in Greater Bendigo that does not have fluoridated water, with just under 5000 missing out on the opportunity for healthier, stronger teeth and a chance at better outcomes in life. Heathcote community leaders have been advocating for water fluoridation for many years due to concerns about the poor health and oral health of residents. Both children and adults in Heathcote have far higher rates of decayed, missing or filled teeth. Community members have limited access to dental services and need to travel about 50 kilometres. Delayed treatment leads to a whole range of adverse health outcomes and entrenched health disadvantages for kids growing up in towns like Heathcote, and this needs to be addressed absolutely immediately.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:49): (643) My question is for the Minister for Education. How many families in Kororoit will benefit from the school saving bonus? The announcement of the school saving bonus in the recent state budget will give families not only in Kororoit but across the state one less thing to worry about when it comes to back-to-school essentials. I am proud to be part of a government that has spent a decade building the Education State, because every child, no matter where they live, deserves an excellent education. This has been a welcomed announcement in my electorate of Kororoit with many families who are doing it tough and having to make hard decisions as to whether to put food on their table or send their kids to school camp. I recently attended Copperfield College, Kings Park. This school is one of the top three ranked government schools in Brimbank, yet I was saddened to hear that many students were unable to go to the school camps because their families simply could not afford it. This \$400 bonus which we are providing families will help make sure that kids have the best start.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:50): (644) My question is for the Minister for Housing in the other place, and the question I have is: will the minister support the Torquay community in its desire to have the Haven Foundation's Big Housing Build 12-unit mental health facility moved from its proposed location in Silvereye Street to the now vacant and available Department of Health land about a kilometre away in Torquay? The government in this week's budget made it clear that they are no longer going ahead with the Torquay community hospital, and the current site is generally believed by the community to be inappropriate – adjacent to a primary school, near a child day care centre and in a street with parking on only one side of the street. The facility will have at minimum 14 or 15 cars associated with it. There is no parking available; there are no outdoor spaces. It is an inappropriate site for the location and would be much better suited on the now available – *(Time expired)*

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:51): (645) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Minister, did the City of Greater Geelong council submit an application to the Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund to support new basketball facilities in the Bellarine? I have had many community members advocate for more indoor sporting facilities in the Bellarine, particularly for basketball. Nearly every week there are 400 basketball players, juniors mainly, who are given a bye, unable to play due to the court shortages. I have spoken to many of the club presidents, including Tim Semple from Ocean Grove Breakers, who have seen a massive growth in their club but

need facilities to practise and play. The regional community sports fund provides a great opportunity to resolve that shortage of indoor facilities in the Bellarine, and I have raised this matter with the mayor and the CEO directly several times. However, I have had local community members reach out with concern that their council may not have taken up this opportunity. I look forward to hearing the response and sharing it with my electorate.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:52): (646) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. One of my Brunswick constituents has raised with me the apparent lack of government action, particularly around mask wearing, to address the high mortality resulting from COVID acquired in hospitals. Recently published modelling by the Burnet Institute and by Department of Health staff has shown that testing patients on admission for COVID antigen and requiring staff to wear N95 masks will save between \$44 million and \$135 million and prevent between 1000 and 2000 deaths. Either intervention alone would save around \$50 million and prevent around a thousand deaths. So my constituent would like to know whether the government plans to implement either or both of these cost-saving and life-saving interventions.

Narre Warren North electorate

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (14:53): (647) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment, and the question that I ask is: how many eligible cans, bottles and cartons have been recycled at the vending machines in Fountain Gate shopping centre and the huge one in Hallam since the container deposit scheme commenced last year? I have had so much amazing feedback from lots of constituents that love the sites and are enjoying being able to deposit their containers locally, as well as the positive impact the scheme has had on our local environment. I am looking forward to hearing from the minister.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:54): (648) My question is for the minister for roads, and the information I seek is for the minister to explain when there will be workers returning to finally finish the Latrobe River bridge at Tyers. The community has lobbied tirelessly for decades for the new bridge to be built, which was at long last due to be finished in December 2023, but we are still waiting for the job to be done properly. For nearly three months there have been no workers onsite to install permanent barriers, the speed limit is still restricted to 40 kilometres per hour and my office has been inundated with questions about what is happening. Regional Roads Victoria recently updated its website to advise these works will be finished at the end of May. The end of May is two weeks away and there is no sign of any works. I wrote to the minister last month requesting an urgent update but have not received a reply. The Latrobe Valley community is sick of being duded by this government, and I ask the minister to explain when the Tyers bridge will be finished.

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:55): (649) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Planning. How can residents of the Glen Waverley district contribute to the government's plan for Victoria initiative? By the early 2050s we know Melbourne is set to have a population the size of London. To ensure we maintain our world-leading standards of living and livability, we need to plan ahead now. Whether it is Blackburn South, Burwood East, Forest Hill, Vermont, Vermont South, Glen Waverley or Wheelers Hill, I say that my community is one of the most livable parts of the most livable city on the planet. Plan for Victoria is all about understanding the community's priorities as we grow sustainably in the years ahead. Whether it is local open space and tree canopy coverage, infrastructure delivery, access to public transport or so much more, the Allan Labor government wants to hear from my community. It is all part of our flagship commitment to build more quality homes close to jobs and in communities where Victorians want to live, just like the Glen Waverley district. I look forward to the minister's response.

Bills**Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:56): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.****National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024***Council's amendments***Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 26, lines 23 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
“*retailer authorisation* means a retailer authorisation within the meaning of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) that authorises the holder to sell electricity;”.
2. Clause 34, lines 27 to 29, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –
“*retailer authorisation* means a retailer authorisation within the meaning of the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) that authorises the holder to sell gas;”.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:57): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:57): Just briefly, the amendments as I understand it are simple amendments that correct typographical changes required and are non-controversial, and the coalition will not be opposing these changes.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (14:57): It is also my understanding that these amendments are very simple in nature. They are not controversial at all. We look forward to seeing this bill pass through the house.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:58): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. Tuesday's budget last week was an opportunity for this Labor government in its 10th year, delivering its 10th budget, to axe tax and not to increase it, to end blowouts, to maintain frontline services, to make housing more affordable, to fix roads, to keep communities safe and finally, and perhaps most importantly for future generations of Victorians not yet born, this government's opportunity in last Tuesday's budget was to outline a credible plan to pay down Labor's record debt. I am sorry to say that on all of those counts, after 10 years of a Labor government, on Treasurer Pallas's

10th budget he failed. This government failed. That is a very, very poor outcome for the state of Victoria and for the 6.7 million residents of Victoria as well.

I understand that in this budget, that in this state taxation bill, there are two taxes that will be increased. Those taxes are the fire services levy and the waste services levy as well – Labor’s bin tax. Those increased taxes total about \$1 billion in additional revenue over the next four years. The thing is, \$1 billion might not seem a lot to some people in this place – it might simply be numbers on a page. But the reality of that \$1 billion in additional revenue is that someone has to pay it – someone has to pay that additional \$1 billion in revenue. The people that have to pay that additional \$1 billion in revenue that this government has booked in this year’s budget are the Victorian people – in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis when they are paying more for grocery bills, they are paying more for power bills, they are paying more for fuel, they are paying more for education and they are paying more to keep a roof over their head with increases to interest rates. At a time when Victorians can least afford it, what this government is doing through last Tuesday’s budget is increasing the tax burden on Victorians. Someone has to pay that additional \$1 billion in revenue, and that is Victorians. At the worst possible time in our state’s history, more taxes are being charged to Victorians. These two increased taxes are number 54 and number 55 of the new and increased taxes since this Labor government were elected 10 years ago. That is right, 55 new or increased taxes at the hands of a state Labor government over the last 10 years. Again, these numbers, these taxes, these increases might simply be numbers on a page buried somewhere deep within a budget book, but the reality of it is that someone has got to pay those new or increased taxes. The people that have to pay those new or increased taxes are Victorians. I am deeply concerned at the missed opportunity by this government in their budget to reduce tax – to axe tax – instead of increasing it; that was the opportunity. The greatest cost-of-living measure that any government can offer their people, their citizens, is to cut tax, is to axe tax, is to reduce tax – but no, that opportunity was missed.

I am deeply concerned, especially when it comes to property taxes, that of the 55 new or increased taxes that this government has burdened Victorians with in the last 10 years, around half of them are on property. People may wonder why we are in the middle of a housing crisis and why we are in the middle of a housing affordability crisis. It is not just supply, but there are further reasons behind that. I argue that one of the very real reasons behind our current crisis when it comes to housing availability and affordability is the new taxes imposed or increased on housing by the state Labor government. I do not think that there would be any member in this place or in the other place that would disagree with the principle of a Victorian who needs a roof over their head getting a roof over their head. I do not think there would be any member in this place or the other place who would disagree with the principle that having a roof over your head provides you with the stability and certainty that you need and you require in order to be a net contributor to the community around you. To give you that stability, to give you that certainty and to give you that confidence to be able to be a net contributor to your community, to take care of yourself, to take care of your family, to find a job, to earn a wage, to pay your way in life and to provide opportunities potentially for other people around you – those are the missed opportunities in last Tuesday’s budget. That is the missed opportunity that this government has actually set aside by not axing taxes but increasing taxes and by introducing new taxes over the last 10 years. I think it is great shame that this opportunity was missed – a great shame.

There was no movement from this government in last Tuesday’s budget to axe their schools tax. The Shadow Minister for Education is currently sitting at the table. She will agree with me, I am sure, that Tuesday’s budget last week was an opportunity to axe Labor’s schools tax. But they did not do that. The basic principle of educational choice that has been the hallmark of bipartisanship agreement within this state –

Jess Wilson interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: and within the country – thank you, member for Kew – for decades, if not more, has been completely undermined by the missed opportunity in last Tuesday’s budget to axe Labor’s schools tax.

When the Labor government introduced their schools tax in last year's budget, what they did was effectively declare class warfare. What they did was effectively say to those parents around the state, 'We want to tax aspiration. We want to tax your opportunity to send your kids to the best school for them on your terms. We want to make it harder for you to make that choice for yourself and for your family and for your children.' There is a myth in this state at the moment, and the myth is an insidious myth. The myth is that only rich people, only people who can afford it, send their kids to an independent school or to a high fee paying Catholic school. That is an absolute myth. I have heard stories, having spoken to principals right around the state, that some of the parents of the children that go to some of those independent schools are working second shifts in taxis in order to pay the fees, in order to give their kids the opportunity of a lifetime to have the best education that they can possibly have. And Labor's response to that is to tax them more. We know, because we have heard from some of these schools, that Labor's schools tax is adding around \$1000 in additional fees to the price of education in independent and some high fee paying Catholic schools. That is not good, because again someone has to pay, and again it is Victorians who are paying the price of the economic mismanagement and the economic recklessness of 10 years of the state Labor government.

The thing here is that with the poor economic decisions that have quite clearly been the hallmark of this government over the last decade, if we translated poor economic decisions and economic recklessness to a family budget or if we translated poor economic management and reckless economic decisions to a business budget, it would be the family who paid the price for the decisions that they made and it would be the business that paid the price for the decisions that they made. But the great injustice of this budget is that when this Labor government, after 10 years of Labor and after 10 years of Labor budgets, makes a poor economic decision, a reckless economic decision – and there are any number of those that I can think of – it is the Victorian people that pay the price for the poor economic management of this Labor government.

It is simply not fair. It is simply not fair on Victorians, who are at the moment finding it hard to make ends meet, who are putting their kids to bed and then sitting around the kitchen table and figuring out how in the hell they are going to pay the bills. These are the stories, this is the truth, of the conversations that are happening around kitchen tables right now, and they just do not get it. They say they care. This government says they care, but their actions tell a very, very different story. If they did care, they would have used the opportunity of last Tuesday's budget to axe tax and not to increase it, to provide that cost-of-living support that Victorians right around this state – not just in metropolitan Melbourne but right around the state, in growth suburbs, in country areas and right to the borders of the state – absolutely need right now. It was a missed opportunity. They did not take it up, and Victorians are paying the price for 10 years of Labor.

There was an opportunity in last Tuesday's budget for this Labor government to axe their health tax. They did not axe their health tax. In fact they will deny that such a thing exists. I would love the Minister for Health or the Premier to meet Dr Hussain – who I met with – with me and tell him that their health tax is nothing but an imaginary thing. It is far from it. Dr Hussain, who services the Tullamarine region of Melbourne and who has 40,000 patients on his books, told me, with tears in his eyes, the story of receiving a payroll tax bill from the State Revenue Office not just for that financial year but backdated for five financial years, and the bill arrived at one time in one piece. The truth of the matter is this: Dr Hussain could not pay that bill, a bill that this Labor government denies actually exists in the first place. The great tragedy of this is for those 40,000 patients that Dr Hussain and the group of his general practitioners see and provide that important, essential and primary health care for. He has had to close down his practice as a result, because if he cannot pay the bill, then he is trading as insolvent, which then voids his insurance, which puts 40,000 people – 40,000 of our fellow Victorians – in and around the Tullamarine region at greater health risk because of decisions that this government has made.

What happens in this place matters. Decisions that are taken in this place matter. The words that are said in this place matter. But this government, after 10 years of governing and after 10 Labor budgets,

simply cannot compute that. The impact of that decision on those 40,000 patients in that area of Melbourne is this: when they are sick they will not go to see another GP, where no doubt Medicare bulk-billing will not even be available to them. They may not go to see a GP because they cannot afford the price of a non-bulk-billed GP appointment, so they will delay their health care, or what they will do is go to an emergency department at a public hospital and clog up an existing system that is already under pressure and already under strain because of the mismanagement of this government over the last 10 years. Whichever way you look at it, this is a bad decision and a bad outcome. Again, last Tuesday's budget was an opportunity to axe tax, not to increase it. It was an opportunity to axe Labor's schools tax and it was an opportunity to axe Labor's health tax, and they did neither. Victorians are paying the price for the poor economic management, the reckless economic management, of this Labor government after 10 years.

There was an opportunity in last Tuesday's budget to increase funding for roads. But, no, the Labor government did not do that. In fact the Labor government reduced road maintenance funding again. That is a great shame. Having driven to a number of regional communities in the last little while – I was in Shepparton and Bendigo only last week – I can tell you firsthand that dodge the pothole is a dangerous game often played by Victorians when they are driving between regional communities in this state. It is not good enough for this Labor government to simply say that they will reduce the speed limit on regional roads as a safety measure, acknowledging that there are potholes on those roads which are dangerous and which are unsafe. That is unacceptable. That is most definitely unacceptable. Reducing the speed limit on a dangerous road is not fixing the road. Fixing the road is getting a work crew out there to fix the road. But again, in this budget, instead of axing taxes they have also axed road maintenance funding, which means that those bad roads in regional communities will again not be fixed.

Budgets are so much more than numbers on a page. They are so much more than spreadsheets, percentages, charts and words. They are so much more than thousands of pages of documentation. They actually demonstrate to the Victorian community the heart and soul of a government, the priorities of a government, what actually makes up the DNA of a government and what its priorities are. My view is, my strong contention is, that in this budget this government has got that all so, so wrong. They say that this government is about families, but as I said yesterday in my budget reply, they are spending more on servicing debt than they are on the entire suite of families, fairness and housing portfolio projects and commitments. That tells you in one neat sentence that their priorities are debt instead of what they say their priorities are, which is helping families. Families around this state know it because they are experiencing it and they have had to experience it over the last 10 years. This is a terrible circumstance, and Victorians are paying the price after 10 years of Labor.

In the property sector there have been \$21.5 billion in taxes crippling the property sector. That take in this budget includes \$7.8 billion in land tax, \$10.1 billion in land transfer duties, \$1.49 billion in COVID debt levy landholdings, \$1 billion in the fire services property levy, \$127 million in the congestion levy, \$221 million in the metropolitan improvement levy, \$125 million in the windfall gains tax, \$25 million in the metropolitan planning levy, \$278 million in the financial accommodation levy and \$250 million in the growth area infrastructure contribution levy – \$21.5 billion of crippling taxes on the property sector, and we wonder why the cost of housing is going up, up, up instead of stabilising and perhaps even at some point in the future going down, down, down. But this Labor government quite clearly, not by their words but by their actions, is simply not interested in doing that. They are not interested in making life easier for Victorians; they are interested in making life hard for Victorians. And I do not just say that because it is a nice two-line statement that could quite easily fit into a social media clip at some point in the future; I say that because it is the absolute, hand-on-heart truth that Victorians know, and Victorians know it because they are on the receiving end of it.

In one year the average electricity bill has gone up by 24 per cent. In one year the average gas bill has gone up by 35 per cent. In one year the average rent bill has gone up by almost 17 per cent. WorkCover bills have skyrocketed under this government. Transportation costs have skyrocketed. Port of

Melbourne fees have skyrocketed, adding to the cost of importing and exporting goods. The payroll tax threshold is simply not competitive, certainly when you compare it to New South Wales. Insurance costs have skyrocketed. The cost of building and maintenance works is higher than ever, if you can in fact find a tradie to undertake the work that needs to be done. On top of this, the government has increased its bin tax and its fire services levy.

Last week I was in Bendigo and I spoke at a post-budget breakfast there on Thursday morning. It was an early start to the day. I made my way to the budget breakfast and I sat down. I was introduced to the table that I was sitting at, and there was one lady there who I spoke to, and she seemed to be quite alert for 7 o'clock in the morning and quite with it, which was surprising as I had not yet had my morning coffee. I spoke to her; I wanted to understand her story. She has told me that because of the increasing taxes on her business, because of the increasing costs for her to do business, she was up at 3 o'clock in the morning at her business before this breakfast to get on top of the orders that she had. Because of the taxes, because of the charges and because of the increasing cost to business, she has had to lay off a staff member, so instead she gets to her business at 3 o'clock in the morning to get on top of those orders, and then she came to the business breakfast. This is the experience of Victorians around this state.

Last year in my budget reply I spoke of the Hihett Charcoal Chicken place, and I look forward to getting back there at some time in the near future. The cost of spuds has gone up by 20 per cent, the cost of cooking oil has gone up by about the same amount and the price of chooks has gone up by about 18 per cent, adding to the cost of doing business. I highly recommend to any member of this chamber that if you want a decent feed, Hihett Charcoal Chicken is the place to be.

There are critical CFA projects that have been delayed because Labor are increasing their fire tax. I am joined at the table by the member for Polwarth, Shadow Minister for Emergency Services and Shadow Minister for Housing. Earlier today we put out a media statement together which outlined the parlous state of the CFA projects that have been delayed despite Labor's increases to their fire services levy. Regional Victorians will pay the price of Labor's financial mismanagement with a massive fire service levy increase revealed in the state budget. Despite this tax increase, the Labor government have decided to delay 83 per cent of existing CFA capital projects by one year. Only 0.5 per cent of the entire tax take of 188 million bucks is actually being spent on critical CFA projects. It begs the obvious question: as this tax is going up and as Victorians are paying out of their hip pockets for this tax increase delivered in this budget through the State Taxation Amendment Bill that this chamber is discussing at the moment, where is that money going if not to support critical CFA projects around this state? Where is it going? We know where it is going. It is quite obvious where it is going. It is going to feed Labor's debt beast; that is where it is going. It is like they get the money in in wheelbarrows, in buckets, and they have got the minions lined up there with shovels, and the debt fire is raging, and they have got the money that comes in and it is being picked up with shovels and it is being shoved into the debt fire. That is exactly what this government does. It does not invest back in critical services and critical projects – critical CFA projects that are needed around the state. No, it only spends 0.5 per cent of the entire tax take on those projects and it does not spend any more than that. What it does with the rest of the money that it takes out of the pockets of hardworking Victorians – singles, families and businesses – is it feeds the debt beast created by this government.

This government will have you believe that their debt position in this state is because of COVID. They will have you believe that. But I encourage you, I encourage those opposite and I encourage every Victorian to understand the truth of this matter: Labor's financial mismanagement is not because of debt caused by COVID, it is because of economic mismanagement and economic recklessness after 10 years of Labor and after 10 Labor budgets. That is the truth of it. We now have the highest debt in the nation – 188 billion bucks – and this government has a plan to pay back around \$31 billion only. So by their own admission they have no plan, diddly squat plan, to pay back around \$150 billion.

Why am I concerned by this? I am concerned by this not only as a Victorian but because it is not just my kids but it is their kids who will be saddled with the consequences of the decisions that are made

by this government today in this chamber. This is the truth of the matter. This generational theft under the hands of this Labor government is an absolute and utter disgrace. It is absolutely and utterly shameless. Sure, if you believe this government, they have a plan to pay back \$31 billion. They are paying that back by increasing taxes on Victorians, making life harder for Victorians at a time that they can least afford it, with their jobs tax, with their rent tax, with their taxes on aspiration, with their schools tax, with their health tax, with their increases to the fire services levy and with their increases to their bin tax. That is the consequence of 10 years of Labor; that is the consequence of 10 Labor budgets.

There are so many things that I could talk about at this time. I will in the time that I have remaining just address some of the other matters in this bill. Although the opposition is broadly supportive of a couple of the changes proposed in this bill – specifically in relation to Trust for Nature and specifically in relation to the changes to land tax under various ownership structures – the opposition indicates quite clearly, not just for this chamber but for every Victorian, that we oppose this bill. We oppose this bill on the basis that it was an opportunity for Labor to axe tax not to increase it. We oppose this bill because this was an opportunity for Labor to wind back their schools tax, to wind back their health tax, to wind back their rent tax and to wind back their taxes on aspiration and their taxes on Victorian businesses, and they missed that opportunity. Whatever good might be in this bill, it is far outweighed by the missed opportunity, it is far outweighed by the bad and it is far outweighed by the impost of these insidious Labor taxes on the hip pockets of Victorian singles, families and businesses in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and at a time when they can least afford it. We oppose this bill.

In the time that I have remaining I just want to, for this chamber's edification, put into context –

Natalie Suleyman interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: I am happy to go, Minister for Veterans, for another 10 minutes, I really am. I am only warming up. Let me put this into context in another way. For last Saturday's TattsLotto super draw, the jackpot was \$20 million. Now, that prize is usually shared amongst a number of winners. But just think for a moment, Acting Speaker, if you or one of the other members of this chamber was the sole recipient of that \$20 million, that Tatts super draw first division prize. Think about the impact that it would have on your family – no more financial worries, your house paid off and your kids taken care of. You could buy practically whatever you wanted to buy. On 8 March this year ratings agency Standard and Poor's reported that it expects Victoria's net debt to rise to \$247.2 billion by 2027. We are now talking about a quarter of a trillion dollars of potential debt, according to this internationally renowned and respected ratings agency. Well, let us put that 20 million bucks into context. To repay the projected 2027 Victorian state net debt you would need to win a \$20 million Tatts super draw on your own every Saturday, every week, every year for 237 years – 237 years of consistently winning a \$20 million Tatts super draw. That is the price that Labor has committed Victorians to. That is the price of their debt. That is the impact of their debt laid bare on the shoulders of every Victorian man, woman and child.

Our state's daily interest payments of \$26 million could pay for 298 paramedics, could pay for 125 ambulances, could pay for two breast cancer centres, could pay for 2651 elective surgeries or could pay for 307 nurses. At \$26 million our current daily interest payment could pay for 510 Victoria Police recruits. I hope they are listening on the government benches, because I have got something coming in for them. That \$26 million a day would pay for 833,000 Victorian ALP branch memberships. I hope I have put it in terms that this Labor government can finally, finally, finally understand.

This is the cost of Labor's debt. This is the cost of Labor's poor economic management and economic recklessness after 10 years of Labor and after 10 Labor budgets, and the tragedy of this is that every Victorian is paying the price for the decisions made by this government over the last 10 years. Acting Speaker, I say emphatically to you, to every member of this house and to every Victorian: we oppose

Labor's taxes. Last Tuesday's budget was a missed opportunity. Instead of axing taxes, taxes were raised. Taxes were increased, and every Victorian is paying the price.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:30): I do intend to actually speak to the bill we have at hand.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: I am in the mood, put it that way. But I do want to just pick up a couple of points about taxes, so I should note that the Andrews–Allan Labor governments have proudly cut or abolished taxes and charges 64 times since being in government, cutting regional payroll tax three times – it is now just one-quarter of the metro rate – and lifting the payroll tax free threshold on multiple occasions. It was \$550,000 when those opposite were last in power. It will be \$1 million from 1 July 2025. We have become the first state in Australia to abolish business insurance duty and abolish stamp duty for commercial and industrial properties. When the opposition were last in power – for one four-year term – they introduced or increased taxes or fees on 24 occasions. Despite all their whatever that was, they abolished or reduced taxes just four times. That is just a little bit of perspective on the record when we are talking about taxes.

Coming back to the bill at hand, what is this bill delivering? The core of this bill is implementing three tax-related changes that were made as part of the Allan Labor government's 2024–25 budget. These are to exempt social and emergency housing from land tax, harmonise Victorian waste levy rates with those of New South Wales and South Australia and establish a trust to support Trust for Nature to set up more conservation covenants on privately owned land in metro Melbourne. I think we can all agree they all sound like extremely sensible and commonsense mechanisms. I am going to go to a couple of them. I do not have so long, but I did want to go to a little more detail.

Firstly, with the exemption for social and emergency housing from land tax, if we are talking about supporting families and households et cetera, incentivising the building of social housing has got to be a good thing. We know that supply is an issue if we look at the spectrum of housing availability. Supply costs are going up. Inflation is going up. I think we can all agree that there are a lot of pressures for families and households alike, hence the central tenets of the budget have been all about focusing on the acute needs of families and households. But I am not going to speak to that so much because I do want to keep within the central tenets of this bill.

But when we are looking at that first element – that is, exempting social and emergency housing from land tax – this change will provide further certainty to the sector, provide a broader range of social and emergency housing with a land tax exemption and encourage innovation in service delivery with the assurance that social and emergency housing that satisfies these parameters will receive a land tax exemption. I challenge those opposite to say that this is not going to be good when it comes to increasing the supply of affordable and in this case social housing for Victorians. That certainly on any account has merit, particularly under the current circumstances where supply of housing is an issue.

With regard to harmonising Victorian waste levy rates with those of New South Wales and South Australia, there is perspective when we see the relativity of the rates being charged. Fundamentally something that has been missing, but we should not be surprised, when we are looking at waste levies is what they are trying to do. We know that we cannot keep fanning the flames. We cannot keep encouraging more and more landfill, because landfill is toxic and is essentially unproductive land. It costs a bomb to maintain. The methane emissions alone are catastrophic when it comes to climate change et cetera. We certainly should not be encouraging more and more landfill, and indeed in our great state of Victoria we have massive reform when it comes to the way that we manage waste. That is about streamlining the way waste is managed across all the councils across Victoria so that when people move from one municipality to another they know what bin does what, but more importantly – although that is a significant element – separating various elements of waste so that they can be far more productive and that we do not mount our landfill increasingly.

We do have targets to get that landfill down by up to about 80 per cent over the next 10 years. We need to, because if we are going to have productive land that we can use, whether it be for agriculture, whether it be for forests and for biodiversity or whether it be for building very much needed housing, surely the less rubbish going to landfill and the more productive land that we have available has got to be a good thing, hence the waste levy. Apart from the fact there is relativity across other states – so Victoria is quite reasonable and rational when you look at the method being put forward by this bill with regard to the waste levy per se – there is a fundamentally sound rationale for incentivising organic waste and for recycling and disincentivising or discouraging more and more waste going to landfill. At the end of the day that will save Victorians, because it is so expensive to keep mounting more and more landfill and not dealing with waste in a productive way.

It does not surprise me at all that those opposite would not be caring too much about waste and about diverting waste from landfill, because the environment has not necessarily been their top priority.

Tim Richardson: They want to burn it.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes. You raise an excellent point, member for Mordialloc. I remember some fancy schemes that they had over there just about burning everything. Never mind the emissions that might float into the air. Do not divert waste from landfill; fill, fill, fill it up and burn it. I will tell you what, setting up those incinerators costs a fortune. They are extremely expensive to set up as well. This is why we do not have them at the top of the tree when it comes to prioritisation of the way that we manage waste. They are actually at the bottom of the scale, so to speak, because (1) they are extremely expensive to set up but (2) they encourage or, conversely, do not discourage people from managing waste in a very unproductive way that is not good for anyone's health. If you really genuinely care about Victorian households and the future generations of Victorians, on the one hand if you are looking at how we manage money, well, managing waste effectively and diverting it from landfill is certainly a mechanism in terms of managing money better, because long term we can see that the more landfill we have the less productive land we have, because it is so toxic and it does not actually serve anyone's purposes.

Coming back to the fundamental rationale, you can see why there is a waste levy in the first place. I hope that that allays some of the concerns of the opposition and they may consider some of the environmental aspects that are associated with this particular levy rather than sweating over it night and day and completely ignoring the fundamental rationale that is driving this change. It is a fundamental change which is very important for our community now and into the future. But of course that relies on the premise of a government that actually prioritises the environment and that actually believes in climate change, which we do on this side of the chamber.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:38): I am delighted to rise and make a brief contribution on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. The reason I say brief is because we have a list of 14 who want to make a contribution on this bill, and bringing it on so late in the day I do not think even half of them are going to get an opportunity. I note that when the government talks about tax bills they like to keep it short and sweet because it is not an area they are very comfortable with. That is why I will make a brief contribution and allow some time for others to make a contribution.

We know Labor cannot manage money – that is well known in this house – and they cannot manage major projects. What happens then is Victorians all pay the price. You have heard us say on many occasions that when Labor runs out of money they come after yours, and we have had 55 new or increased taxes since the Andrews Labor government came to power in 2014, many of those during a cost-of-living crisis. We are finding during this cost-of-living crisis that people really are struggling, and yet the taxes just keep rolling on in. If I look at some of those taxes, particularly related to the cost of living, there was the increased fire services property levy in 2015–16. We all know that was taboo stuff – FRV. It certainly was not going to the CFA, the increased fire services property levy. And then they did it again in 2019–20.

A further tax on cost of living is a new point-of-consumption gambling tax. What have they got against punters? I am concerned that there are just little taxes here, there and everywhere. And I note that they are doing away with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. That is a bill for another time. I am well aware of that. But having been on that board for over 10 years, I am quite disappointed that the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation will not see the light of day. It was \$37.5 million a year that has been spent to try and assist vulnerable people and to assist people with gambling problems. And then there was the tripling of the brown coal royalties in 2016–17, and we wonder why the power goes up – again, related to cost of living. I am trying to bring it back there to talk about the cost-of-living taxes that are just hurting, hurting, hurting. Then there was a tax on Uber and taxi fares in 2016 and 2017, and people just need to get around. Further to that, there have been other tax increases – a new city access tax for West Gate Tunnel, a new on-dock rail charge on imported shipping containers. When that happens, everybody pays. We know how much freight comes in through the ports and how reliant we are on the ports. When you increase the charges for on-dock rail that hurts everybody, and again, cost of living goes up.

An increase to the municipal industrial landfill or the bin tax – again, that is felt by every Victorian, usually through their rates notice more so than a direct tax when they go out and spend. But again, that is another tax that contributes to that cost-of-living pressure. Then there was the number plate tax and the electric vehicle tax, so it just goes on and on. There was the expanded point-of-consumption tax on gambling – again, another bite at the punters. And a 10 per cent increase to Victorian government penalty units – I mean, it is bad enough getting a fine, and now they are putting the fines up, all because of the black hole they are trying to get themselves out of. There was an increase in the wagering and betting tax in 2021, an increased fire services levy in 2021–22 and a 50 per cent increase to Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria fees – so nobody is spared when it comes to these taxes that have been invented or increased. And again there was an increase in the wagering and betting tax in 2023–24 – I do not know how many goes they have had at the punter.

Then came the schools tax on independent schools on top of the fact that some of those students who go to independent schools, or most of them, will not be eligible for this \$400 rebate that the government spruiked at last week's state budget announcements, so that is quite disappointing. Then there was the holiday and tourism tax – and on top of that they are reducing the funds to Visit Victoria's destination marketing, which is going to really hurt our tourism industry. There is a new health tax on GPs and allied health – you know, when you get a sick kid, you would hate to have to make the decision: can I afford to go to the doctor, or will I just wait this one out for a day or two and see if my kid gets better? Then of course last week there were two more taxes, the bin tax increased again and so did the fire services levy. That is 20 out of the 55 new and increased taxes that will have direct cost-of-living effects on people and communities.

I also want to touch on the housing crisis. When we talk about taxes and those that have been related directly to housing, whether you are building a house, whether you are renting a property, whether you are a landlord, whether you are a renter, whatever part of the housing structure you are in – which is all of us, we all need a roof over our head – there are a further 27 taxes associated with that. A new stamp duty on property transfers between spouses came in in 2017–18. That is a quick hit for somebody who is probably already in a predicament trying to change their personal circumstances. Now they are getting hit on transfers between spouses. There was an increase in stamp duty on new cars – again, it does not seem like much, but that was back in 2017–18. All that contributes as we go forward.

Stamp duty was introduced on off-the-plan purchases. We had never had stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases, and it was really important that that remained that way because it made it competitive for off-the-plan to get up and running, because every building that gets built, with all the red tape and green tape that goes on now, gets more and more expensive. Now with the stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases, that makes it out of reach for many. Then came the vacant home tax, and the new annual property valuation to increase land tax. On land tax, in our office we would get 10 to 15 phone calls,

walk-ins or emails every day from people complaining, concerned about the new land tax. And we know the parameters have changed on land tax. People who never have seen land tax before are now getting hit with land tax bills, and that is quite disappointing because it is above the \$300,000 threshold. There is even land tax on \$50,000 to \$300,000. I am getting young couples coming in. They have bought property and they cannot get a builder for a year or two. When that happens, they are paying land tax so they can build their dream home. It was not that long ago that the former Premier said that Victorians are not aspiring to own their own home. Well, that is rubbish. People still have a dream of owning their own home. Most Victorians – I cannot say all, but most Victorians – dare to dream, and we certainly hope they have that opportunity.

I did say I was not going to go for my full time, but when you start talking tax you just cannot stop, because we know what this government have done to Victoria. You cannot tax your way out of it. At some point in time you have to stop spending. You cannot tax your way out of a \$188 billion debt as we rocket towards that. There comes a point in time that you have to stop spending. When we left government there was a \$20 billion debt in Victoria. That had gone from \$6 billion to \$20 billion over 44 years. That is how long it took to get from a \$6 billion debt to a \$20 billion debt, and in only 12 years this government will run that debt from \$20 billion up to \$188 billion. We know Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage major projects. As I say, you cannot keep taxing your way out of this. At some point you have got to read the tea-leaves. You actually have to stop spending money. I will leave my contribution there and allow time for others to have their say.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:47): I also rise to speak on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. I want to start by thanking the Treasurer for bringing this bill and the budget to the house. Ten years in that role is a magnificent achievement for anyone. I was actually disappointed that we could not hear more from the member for Ovens Valley, because I think he missed out on talking about a lot of stuff. I know he wanted to talk about introducing taxes, but he failed to mention that when the opposition was last in power, from 2010 to 2014, in just one term they introduced or increased taxes or fees on 24 occasions. I am sure that the member for Ovens Valley was just about to get to that, and that is why he chose to run out of time. I am just wanting to make sure we continue that theme, to remind everyone – remind the viewers at home – that this was a policy of the Liberal–National coalition at the time.

The member for Ovens Valley also did not have time to talk about the taxes and fees that the Andrews and Allan Labor governments have cut. Sixty-four times taxes and charges have been cut since we were first elected in 2014. I particularly want to focus on the payroll tax changes, because they have been very significant, particularly for small business. I see the Minister for Small Business at the table. I am sure that she goes around to many small businesses across Victoria and that they know how important these tax cuts are. Particularly when you are starting a small business and you have only got a handful of employees and you are building up to that sort of medium-size business, having that extra higher threshold makes a huge difference. Also, having a lower payroll tax – the percentage – in regional areas can make a huge difference to setting up a small business in regional Victoria. I know there is a local business in Box Hill that is just doing some exploratory work at the moment, investigating potentially setting up some manufacturing in Victoria, and it is looking at the opportunity to invest in regional Victoria. They were very happy to know about the payroll incentives that exist and encourage them to set up business in regional Victoria. The regional payroll tax is just one-quarter of the metro rate; it is just 1.2 per cent, which is the lowest in the country. I want to just remind the house that in last year's budget we committed to lifting the payroll tax threshold to \$1 million, so that 6000 businesses will no longer pay a cent of payroll tax. I believe that will be in place from 1 July 2025.

I also want to briefly reflect on the overall tax burden that we like to talk about. Those opposite would have us believe that Victoria is the highest taxing state, but they forget to remind the public that taxes take many forms. If you look across most of the other states, they have a big chunk of revenue that is called royalties. If you are adding up the total revenue, it should take in royalty payments, which are

effectively a tax – it is a tax on using the resources that a state owns. In Victoria we do not have the luxury of having the resources that many of the other states have and therefore we do not have the royalty payments that many of the other states have. Our overall tax burden means that Victoria actually gets the lowest revenue per capita of any state or territory. So you can cherry-pick the figures all you like and you can look at one particular measure of taxation, but taxation takes many forms; it is about all of the revenue, and royalties are clearly a tax which gets passed on to the miners who are digging the material out of the ground.

If I come to the details of the bill, there are quite a number of taxation measures which are addressed. One that I do want to mention are the amendments being made to the Land Tax Act 2005 to provide standalone exemptions from land tax for land used or available for use for social or emergency housing. I think there have been many debates in this house about the need for additional housing in general but particularly the dire need for additional social and emergency housing. I think it is a great privilege to be part of a government that has invested so heavily in social housing. Our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is Australia's biggest ever investment in public and community housing. I do want to pay particular tribute to the former member for Richmond and former Minister for Housing for really driving this policy agenda at the time, because it was and remains a visionary program to really deliver the social housing that we need.

I think having incentives such as the land tax exemptions can only benefit the providers so they can bring that social and community housing and emergency housing onto the market. Just last week I was out with the Minister for Housing at a development in Box Hill where 73 social housing dwellings are being provided. It is a real partnership with the community housing provider and the private sector and the council – I should call out Whitehorse council on this as well – and the Victorian government, which is providing funding for it. It is a former council car park. Council provided that land to the developer, and the developer is building a private development next to a nine-storey development with social housing. If you were looking at that facility, just because it is so centrally located in central Box Hill, it will literally be next door to the entrance to the Suburban Rail Loop station. That parcel of land would cost into the millions, so you can imagine the land tax bill that a community housing provider would have to pay if they did not get land tax relief. Having that relief and having that facility allows them to ensure they have got the money to purchase those properties at a discounted rate and then provide them to some of our most vulnerable Victorians.

It was really magnificent – the facility is not finished, but we did have a walk-through and we were able to walk up to the communal deck, which is being built at the moment on the rooftop. The apartments are really top class, and this is what we should be building. Every person who is in social housing deserves to have good-quality accommodation with full electric appliances, nice light and close access to services. We should not be shunning social housing and putting it out where people cannot access the services that they need. That is a really important measure that is included in this State Taxation Amendment Bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (15:57): I too rise to speak on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. From the outset it is very disappointing that we are only getting a couple of hours this afternoon to debate this important piece of legislation, much like the situation we had after last year's budget where we saw the government ram through the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2023 by introducing it into the house while leaving less than 24 hours for community consultation and consultation with stakeholders on a taxation bill that saw land tax increases, payroll tax increases, a new tax on non-government schools and a COVID debt levy that was set to raise \$8.9 billion over the coming years. Again this year we are seeing the government curtail debate on the important issue of taxing Victorians by guillotining this bill after under 2 hours of debate time, leaving many of my colleagues without the ability to speak on this piece of legislation.

From the outset, to pick up on the member for Box Hill's and indeed the member for Albert Park's points, I can see that the talking points have gone around and around about how the Allan Labor government has reduced taxes – somewhat of a confusing scenario with 55 new or increased taxes

over the past decade. Of course we saw then Leader of the Opposition Andrews, later Premier, on the eve of the 2014 election make a commitment to the Victorian people that there would be no new or increased taxes under a Labor government – 10 years down the track we have 55 new or increased taxes.

Just to the member for Box Hill's point around the reform that he spoke to around payroll tax and the lifting of that threshold, unfortunately, despite lifting that threshold, Victoria remains uncompetitive, with that threshold still being behind that of New South Wales, that threshold still being lower than that in Queensland and that threshold still being below that of South Australia. That simply makes it less competitive for Victorian businesses. We know that the South Australian Premier is knocking at the door of Victoria telling Victorian small businesses, 'Don't bother in Victoria. They're going to tax you more. They're going to make it harder to do business.' We have seen the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's report that shows once again that the hardest state to do business in is Victoria. Unfortunately, lifting the payroll tax threshold does not do anything to compete with the other states. It does not incentivise businesses to grow, to expand and to set up here in Victoria.

What is sure under this government – and I think it was Benjamin Franklin that said there is nothing that is certain in life other than death and taxes – is that there is nothing more certain under the Allan Labor government than record debt and higher taxes. As I said, this budget comes after 10 years of Labor budgets, 10 years of Labor's financial mismanagement, and what have we see from that? Of course we have seen blowouts, we have seen waste, we have seen reckless spending and we have seen record taxes. We have seen the tax revenue take increase from \$17.8 billion in 2014 to a projected \$45 billion over that 10-year period. That is a huge increase, and that impost is felt by Victorian households and by Victorian businesses, and when we talk about the tax burden in this state we know that it is the highest tax burden in the country – over \$5000 hanging over the heads of Victorians because of the decisions of this government to impose tax increase after tax increase and new tax after new tax.

In this bill and in this budget we see, of course, a number of taxes increased – the waste levy increased and the fire services levy increased as well. That fire services levy increase will only see that flow through to ratepayers through increased rates at a time that Victorians can least afford it. One thing that has not been really spoken about in this piece of legislation today is the changes to the vacant residential land tax. These are changes that are being put in place by the government because when they put through the initial changes last year they made a few mistakes that resulted in those Victorians that hold their holiday home in a family trust being unexpectedly hit with land tax, and they have had to correct that mistake. They have had to come into the Parliament with this piece of legislation and correct their own mistake and say, 'Apologies. We're going to backdate that and actually not see you pay land tax on your holiday home, which has been exempt from land tax and from the vacant residential tax for many, many years.'

We saw in last year's budget and through last year a number of new taxes increased, and the COVID debt levy in particular, raising \$8.9 billion, saw hundreds of thousands of Victorian home owners and property investors hit with land tax for the very first time. That is a tax that will flow through directly to renters in this state. And as the Shadow Treasurer said yesterday, we have seen a 17 per cent increase in rents at a time when we have got a 1 per cent vacancy rate here in Victoria. We have a housing crisis, we have a rental crisis, and the answer from this government is to increase taxes on property. In their landmark statement last year, the housing statement that they all like to speak to, the 80,000 homes targeted over the next decade – something that we are seeing spoken less about at the moment – just a few days after that announcement, that target of 80,000 homes being announced, we saw the Treasurer come out at an industry breakfast and say to the property industry, 'But we're going to hit you with a raft of new taxes. We're going to hit you with a number of new taxes that are going to make it harder for you to build new in homes in this state.' We all know that the answer to the housing crisis, to the rental crisis, is to increase supply, yet what we are seeing through the increases to land tax are property investors taking their properties off the market and putting them up for sale in

record numbers, resulting in less properties available on the rental market. In this year's budget what we can see is (1) of course no relief across any taxation but an average increase of 6.3 per cent of land tax over the coming years.

Then of course there was the increase to payroll tax, and we saw the hit on businesses after the recent increase to payroll tax through the mental health levy – another hit to businesses in this state – and of course the introduction of the schools tax, a tax that was initially set out in the budget to hit 110 schools across Victoria, but the government realised its mistake, realised that those schools that had a fee threshold of \$8500 simply could not afford it, that families would have to pull out their children from those schools, and lifted that threshold in a backtrack from this government. Now we see it is 59 schools after one of those schools, Andale School in my own electorate, managed to get an exemption and managed to appeal to the minister and say, 'We are a school of 22 kids, a school that provides specialised education, and you are hitting us with a \$15,000 tax bill that we simply cannot afford.' Those schools are passing through that cost of course to their families – up to \$1000 year in fees. There are 59 schools on the list at the moment, but that is only set to increase with the government refusing to index that \$15,000 threshold. We know that there are a number of schools that are likely to be included on the list in the coming 12 months, whether that is Alice Miller School in the electorate of Macedon, Alphington Grammar in the electorate of Northcote, Ballarat Clarendon College and Ballarat Grammar in Wendouree, Girton Grammar in Bendigo West, Kardinia International College in the electorate of Lara or North-Eastern Montessori School in the electorate of Eltham. These are all schools that are likely to be included on the schools hit list in the coming years because the government refuses to set the rate of \$15,000 with indexation.

This government continues to tax Victorians. They continue to take and take and take, and with their debt bill rising, with it set to hit \$188 billion in the coming years, their answer is to tax Victorians more to try and tax their way out of this problem. But unfortunately what we are seeing is the debt rising and the deficit deepening this year, despite the increased tax take, and that is resulting in a greater burden on Victorians at a time when they cannot afford it. This government cannot manage money and they cannot manage major projects, and it is Victorians that are paying the price.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:07): The opposition are opposing this bill to prove a point. The opposition are opposing land tax exemptions for emergency housing. The opposition are opposing land tax exemptions for family violence shelters. The opposition are opposing land tax exemptions for community housing. I think that to do that just to prove a point – to attempt to reduce support for emergency shelters and women's shelters to prove a point – is something that we on this side certainly oppose. As someone who has worked in a family violence shelter, I find it abhorrent that you would seek to reduce the support that the government would give to a family violence shelter, to the workers there and to the people who are attempting to help people in our community just to prove a point. I think that that is very sad and very shameful. We have fantastic housing providers in this state who deserve our respect and support. I think of Community Housing Limited, who I met with recently in Mernda along with the Community Housing Industry Association CEO. We were there at a property that was developed to support people in my community that need assistance with housing. It is a funny-shaped block that they have built on, and the reason that they purchased that block is because it is close to public transport, it is close to shops, it is close to schools and it is close to allied health services. The organisations that build these and run these properties need to be flexible and agile to purchase appropriate properties as they become available, as was the case in my electorate up there in Mernda.

Once these organisations have purchased a property, it would not be right then for this government, which is doing so much to increase housing supply, to then attempt to cripple these organisations in that way. We are a government that is supporting the increased supply of community housing and social housing, and we are a government which supports providers of emergency accommodation for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness as well as people who are experiencing or at risk of family violence. For those opposite to oppose this support to those people to prove a point is shameful.

I would also like to point out that in opposing this bill they are opposing additional funding for Sustainability Victoria. Sustainability Victoria has a fabulous focus on the circular economy and moving us as a state towards a future where we do not throw things out as we used to. This sounds crazy, but as a child I used to wander the mounds of the tip looking for toys and things to take home. That does not happen in this world anymore, thank goodness. To get us to the point where we do not have masses of landfill we have increased our focus on the circular economy.

Sustainability Victoria supported the Mernda Neighbourhood House in my community to establish the Mernda Repair Cafe, and what a fabulous job they do there helping people to fix items that otherwise might have ended up in landfill – items like broken bikes. I took a frying pan there which was fixed. All these types of things that otherwise might be thrown out and cause increased cost to the household as well as increased landfill can be fixed at the Mernda Repair Cafe. Good ideas spread, and the support that the Mernda Repair Cafe went on to give to the establishment of the Donnybrook Repair Corner has really pleased me. Now not just in Mernda but also in Donnybrook you can take your items to be repaired. We are moving towards this stronger focus on ensuring that we are not just throwing things out and that we are making responsible use of our waste. In opposing this bill those opposite are opposing additional funding for Sustainability Victoria and the good things that have flowed from them in my community.

Starting from June we will see some changes in payroll tax. The budget helps business, we know, and we are progressively removing stamp duty on industrial and commercial properties. We also know that there are payroll tax changes from 1 July. We are gradually abolishing business insurance duty. On payroll tax, as we heard from the member for Box Hill, we are lifting the payroll tax free threshold. It will go from \$700,000 to \$900,000 and then on to \$1 million, and 22,000 businesses will benefit from this by paying less payroll tax. As a result of these changes, 6000 businesses will pay no payroll tax, which is a fantastic support for small business.

The \$2.3 million for small business advice and support included in the budget is something that I know the small businesses of my community will welcome. Recently the Minister for Small Business joined me in Donnybrook, where we held a small business forum to discuss the challenges, priorities and process for setting up a small business. We went through the supports that are available through Business Victoria, and my goodness there are so many ways that this government is supporting small business. Through Business Victoria you can participate in an online workshop. You can receive different tools and templates to support you in the establishment of your business, or indeed you can work one on one with a mentor who will help you step by step through the establishment of a business. In the discussions there with the small businesses and the people that wish to start a small business, there was great excitement but also great trepidation. They expressed surprise at the supports that were available. I would encourage all members to make sure that they are spreading the word to their small business community in their electorates about the supports that are available. Certainly we have the business bus, which travels around to provide that support to different communities, but there are so many supports that are already available online for people to access.

The member for Sandringham was talking about the property industry, and he was concerned about the property industry and the impost of taxes on them. In that, he referred to the growth areas infrastructure contribution tax, and he said it was a crippling tax. This is the money that developers pay to make sure that the people who they are profiting from in the building of houses and estates also have access to the basic services that they require – the building of parks, sports facilities and the like. I think that it was quite revealing then that the member for Sandringham would speak of this as something that is crippling the property industry rather than as something that is supporting families to ensure that they have what he may take for granted in his electorate – the things that he has access to. We will continue to ask people to pay their fair share while we work towards building a community which is sustainable and fair, is good for women and cares for those who need it.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:17): I wish it was my pleasure to rise to speak on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024, but it is anything but, because these increased taxes and cuts to important

services and infrastructure are really going to hit every single Victorian household – they really are. There are a few things that are going to hit regional and rural communities in particular that I want to talk about. I know that I often say that I will be brief, and I will try to keep it brief because I would like a few more from our side of the house to get up and have their say today, even though we have only got a little bit of time left.

I want to start with the increase to the waste management levy. As a former councillor and mayor, this is something I have had to deal with firsthand. I have four councils in my electorate. In the 37,500 square kilometres that is the Mildura electorate there are four councils, and I have reached out to a few of those, because I know how this is going to not only hit them and their ability to provide service but end up as a separate line on the rates notice. The councils are going to get the blame for that as well as the fire services levy, which we will get to.

I have a couple of statements from these councils that I think are important to get on the record, so I thought I would take time to do that today. Mildura Rural City Council, which is obviously the largest council in my electorate, said that an increase in the waste levy for the 2025–26 year of 30 per cent is a significant burden on regional and rural communities and that this will directly impact the cost of living for everyone. Waste services are, for the most part, an essential service. That is the Mildura Rural City Council. They do not just do the township of Mildura. Remember they deliver waste management services to as far as Murrayville, which is at the South Australian border, that Mallee track. We have to think about this differently, because it is fine for inner-city and regional and outer suburban areas of this state, but once we are talking about outback Victoria, which is what we are, it is a real burden. Small rural and regional councils just cannot wear any more state government cost shifting. The Swan Hill Rural City Council said the fire services levy and the waste management levy will hurt ratepayers and ultimately renters – state government taxes that get put on the rates notice so council gets the blame. Waste levies are just another tax grab that, again, councils get the blame for – increasing rates and charges outside the rate cap. They said that, if the government was investing more in recycling and circular economies in rural and regional areas, they could swallow it, but they are not. That comes from the Swan Hill Rural City Council, which takes in areas like Robinvale in my electorate.

While we are on the fire services levy, there has been an issue – and I am sure it is in all regional areas and rural areas in particular – with investment in appliances so that fire brigades can do their job. We had an issue in Merbein actually last week where the 14-year-old pumper that belongs to the FRV station 72 had just returned after being repaired for quite some time and on its way to a grassfire had a significant malfunction and ended up broken down on the side of the road. This is something I have raised a few times, so let us hope that some of those fire services levies actually get to the stations and the brigades that need them, like the CFA stations out in rural communities. They have been absolutely gutted, and they are the backbone of rural communities. The CFA in those small communities is where everyone goes to gather. They are all volunteers, and they feel like they are just overlooked. They are certainly not underestimated by the people that rely on them, because they do a power of work. They are incredible people, but obviously with things like this and not getting the investment they deserve they feel neglected. They are frustrated. Given how long it takes now and how difficult it is to get new members – because they are volunteers – they are even more frustrated. This is something I share.

Lastly I want to talk about the amount of investment that has been taken out of family violence – \$29 million I think it is. I spoke earlier about how the current investment is not hitting the ground in regional communities where it really needs to be. The need for it is desperate. We are at crisis point, and more lives will be lost if it does not start to funnel down. But with a significant cut like that \$29 million I have little faith that anything is actually going to change.

We could talk about the State Taxation Amendment Bill for a long time. We could talk about payroll. I have noticed some members have spoken about land tax. Let us talk about land tax actually – let us talk about that for a minute. I was on the phone to more real estate agents during the week. And the member for Kew mentioned it – she mentioned that rental properties are being listed in record numbers to be put on the market, so renters in these properties are being evicted. I had another email from

someone yesterday saying that her daughter is being evicted because the owner needs to sell that property because of land tax and all of the other difficulties that come with being a landlord these days or owning more than one property.

It has been said multiple times before – the member for Kew mentioned it earlier – that solving the housing crisis relies on the private sector. They are the ones that own the rental properties. We need landlords. They are not the devil. I know they get painted to be that in this place all the time. Landlords are not the devil. Landlords are the ones that are actually going to house renters. Why on earth you would disincentivise people to own second or third properties or fourth – or 15 houses – that they rent out long term and do not put on the short-stay market is absolutely beyond me. Why on earth would you do that, particularly when there's talk of the Big Housing Build and creating more public and social housing, but it is just never going to happen, let us be honest. What we should actually be doing to solve the housing crisis is incentivising landlords and incentivising the mum-and-dad investors, who might own one extra property to help with their retirement or to help with a little bit of extra income – if they can even get it at the moment because of the land tax and everything else that they have to pay. If they are not making money out of it, is it any wonder they are putting them on the market? It is just incredible.

There is a reason why vacancy rates are so low, and that is because renters are being evicted out of these properties at an enormous rate so that they can be sold. So when we talk about why we would oppose these taxes, it is common sense. It is pretty simple. It is common sense, and common sense should prevail.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:25): State taxation bills are always a really interesting opportunity to reflect upon the priorities of political parties and their preparedness to govern. Take our colleagues in the Greens, and I use the word lightly. I wish them a happy weekend, on Wednesday.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: I will be coming to the member for South-West Coast in just a moment, but the Greens have never met a problem that they could not resolve with a tax rate of 100 per cent. You could try and point out to them that a tax rate of 100 per cent would raise literally zero revenue, but I suppose they have got methods that Stalin, their hero, would adopt in that scenario and there would be a way of getting around it. But they are not really relevant to this conversation.

I have been listening very carefully, so please have some sympathy for me, to the contributions of those opposite talking about what they would do as the apparently alternative government. But I think it is reflective of their political and policy immaturity that there has not been a single measure, with perhaps one exception, in the budget that they have not criticised from the perspective of seeking more funding for that measure while simultaneously calling for every single taxation measure in the state budget to be slashed – for there to be effectively zero revenue, to cut off the mammoth amount of spending that they presumably want.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: I am glad that the member for South-West Coast is at the table – the Dennington delegate to the International Monetary Fund – who has come in here time and time again calling for increased funding for every single measure in the budget while simultaneously calling for taxes to be slashed.

I am an economic rationalist. I believe in lower taxes to incentivise and encourage economic aspiration and activity. But I also believe in being honest with people, in being straight with Victorians, in giving them a real proposition that, if you want a level of public services at a particular point, it requires taxation to pay for them. It is a fundamental dishonesty of those opposite, who are not prepared for government, to come in here calling for taxes to be slashed at every turn and calling for spending to rise to gargantuan levels, which is the practical manifestation of what they are coming in here calling for.

That confers a fundamental lack of credibility upon them and a concomitant absence of trust in what they are selling. Whatever they are selling, Victorians are not buying. It is nice to refer to Liz Truss from time to time – she had such a short prime ministership in the UK that we did not get to dwell upon just how cataclysmically bad it was – but basically those opposite are indulging in Trussite economics. They want higher spending on every single measure, bar one – admittedly bar one. They also want taxes to be slashed at every turn. As I say, I share that aspiration for lower taxes to encourage aspiration, to create opportunity and to create jobs, and that is why this government has cut taxes 66 times since 2014. It is why we have instigated differential payroll taxes across the state – to encourage regional job creation. The private sector has done so as a consequence of those policy settings, and I am never, ever forgetting for a second that it is the private sector creating those jobs.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: The member for South-West Coast, believe me, has made her contribution on this bill.

The spending measures I do not really want to talk about too much because I am conscious that they are better reserved for the take-note motion. But I do really want to focus on that fundamental tension and dishonesty of those opposite, who propose slashed taxes at every turn but who have never come up with a credible proposition for how public services need to be paid for. At no point – and I have listened, as I say, very carefully to the budget reply, to the contributions on the appropriations bills and to the contributions ostensibly on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 – has this ever been properly grappled with. That point of reconciliation of taxation – of revenue collection – and of spending has never, ever been achieved. I do want to reflect on that.

As I say, it is policy and political immaturity that are great in a debating chamber – the student politicians of Warrnambool might be able to get away with it – but when you come to a general election, you need to be credible. You need to front up to Victorians and say, ‘If you want a level of service that Victoria deserves, it does cost money,’ so how do you have the lowest possible taxation burden to pay for that? In the context of our state budget, it is an interesting mix, because since 1942 with the transmission of income tax powers to the Commonwealth, the revenue collection powers of states have diminished. We are not where we were at Federation. The federal government, as we know and we saw last night, has vastly greater revenue collection powers – taxation powers, and I talk about those because that is what we are talking about today, the taxation bill – and revenue-raising powers than states do.

A lot of the revenue side of the state budget that we read a week ago when the Treasurer handed it down related to GST contributions by the Commonwealth Grants Commission and also a lot of tied grants for specific purpose payments. The taxes for which the state itself has untrammelled control are a reasonably small proportion of the overall budget – things like payroll tax, stamp duty, land tax and another couple of taxes that I want to talk specifically about today. Waste levies – that has been talked about by a number of members opposite, and I believe the member for South-West Coast has had a go during a number of people’s contributions as well, but the harmonisation of Victorian waste levies with New South Wales and South Australia I think is a really important measure, because it is a means of, in effect, using the taxation system to positively influence behaviour so that you do not have the inducement of demand across the border as a consequence of the arbitrage between differential taxation rates. That is a positive thing in that it will simultaneously reduce the incentive for dodgy South Australians and unscrupulous New South Welshmen – and there are many – to come across into our state with their rubbish and to dump it into our landfill, taking advantage of a differential taxation regime. That is not something I think as Victorians we want to encourage and to accept in the long run. It is out of step with neighbouring states and it creates environmental damage for Victoria. But simultaneously, it will also add to the revenue base that Victoria enjoys as a consequence of increased levies.

There is a benefit to this in and of itself. For my community, residents in Greenvale, the single issue that is raised most commonly with me by constituents is the issue of illegal dumping along our roadside verges, particularly Somerton Road and Mickleham Road. We are an area on the verge of a growing urban area and a green wedge, and in that area there is quite a lot of household construction. There are some challenges whereby a very small proportion of the community have an outsized impact upon the amenity and the quality of the environment that we all enjoy. It is a real bugbear. I want to shout out to Hume City Council for the work that they do in being incredibly responsive, as my friend the member for Broadmeadows knows, to residents' concerns about illegal dumping. One of the challenges, though, as I think we are all aware here, is that it is one of those issues that is at the interface of local and state government as a consequence of our management as a state government of arterial roads like Somerton Road, like Craigieburn Road and like Pascoe Vale Road in the member for Broadmeadows's electorate, and indeed the member for Pascoe Vale's. The management of those roads of course is the responsibility of the state government, and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria works with VicRoads to both prevent the incidence of illegal dumping and then respond to it. So I am really happy that they are utilising this revenue-raising measure through the harmonisation of waste levy rates. Effectively that revenue will be sequestered into the EPA to enable it to crack down –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: Absolutely, thank you. Really, it will. It will be sequestered into the EPA to enable them to take the action that I think all of us in this place want to see in our communities – all of us. This harmonisation rate, as I say, is an important thing. It will shift behaviour at the margin and also, as a consequence of the EPA being given that additional revenue, it will have a greater capacity to crack down on that very small number of people across our communities who have an outsized and deleterious impact on quality of life. It is something that I find unfathomable, how somebody could perpetrate that kind of wilful criminal damage upon our community. This money will go some way to ensuring that it is lessened and its impact is lessened.

In the very short time remaining to me this afternoon, I want to talk about the important work the Treasurer has done in relation to gambling taxation reform, which will have the consequence of strengthening the regulatory oversight of casinos in this state. I have had a longstanding interest in anti-money-laundering and counterterrorism financing issues, and a lot of the pernicious behaviour of casinos in this space was brought to light not as a consequence of the former Liberal–National government, which effectively did nothing when it came to vast quantities of money coming into the country and being laundered through casinos, but as a consequence of really effective investigative journalism from Fairfax and other outlets, as well as state-based inquiries into the casino sector. They have exposed a really dark problem at the heart of casinos. The measures in the taxation bill will strengthen casinos' obligations to report back regularly to government. I commend this bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:35): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. This is a taxation bill that will bring more taxes to the state of Victoria and to the community and the families that live and work and reside here in Victoria – 55 new taxes. Before I go on to a couple of those that are introduced in this bill, I would like to rebut what the member for Greenvale was stating. He actually stated that it is politically immature of me – 'the person from Warrnambool' I think he called me – to actually think that you have to keep taxing to be able to get income. Well, I remind the member for Greenvale that the former Premier said on the night before he was elected to power a decade ago – his word, which was ironclad – that there would be no new taxes. The member for Greenvale gets up there saying, 'It's very justifiable. We're introducing 55 new taxes because we need the money.' Well, my friend, what you need is a fiscal responsibility management course to make sure this budget that has been handed down does not get any worse.

The way the Treasurer presented this budget last Tuesday was with absolutely no enthusiasm, almost remorse, but he fell short of apologising to Victorians, which I think very much in the back of the mind he was thinking about. What Victorians now have is a debt of \$188 billion by 2028 with an interest bill daily of \$26 million, with no plan to pay back that debt. The excuse was that we had COVID. Let

me remind particularly the member for Greenvale that all the states in this country had COVID. But we have a debt, unlike the other states, greater than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania put together. That is absolutely disgraceful and frightening. That is why we have borrowings that mean we have to pay \$26 million a day in interest payments by 2028 – \$26 million a day. How many schools would that build, how many surf lifesaving clubs for Warrnambool, how many basketball stadiums for Portland, how many basketball stadiums for Warrnambool? How many elective surgery procedures would that fund?

People are languishing in pain as we speak because this government cannot get the health budget in order. The Minister for Health said just a few weeks ago, ‘I will tolerate nothing less than 240,000 elective surgeries done per year.’ Well, guess what, the budget just came out: they will only be doing 200,000. So her words are hollow – her words to the people languishing in pain and desperately needing shoulder replacements, hip replacements, knee replacements. They are struggling and suffering because of the mismanagement of this government – the mismanagement that has seen 55 taxes just in the last decade after saying there will be no more, and there are two more in this bill. The first one that I will discuss is the waste management charge. It has doubled. To put waste into the tips, the state government will be heading towards the pockets of families, which will directly impact not only home owners and young families – all families – but renters as well. That will be passed on, like all the other property charges that equate to 27 of the 55 taxes that this government has introduced.

That is why we have a housing crisis. That is why they have upset the equilibrium in the market. They have not built enough social houses, they have sold off assets and they have taxed the property market so that investors are not coming to the party – they are selling in their droves, and people are being left homeless. For the member for Narre Warren North to actually talk about the fact that they are investing in helping the homeless – well, build the houses, and that helps the homeless. Those services that are handing out swags and offering tents to people are at their wit’s end. Can you imagine working in that sector right now? How disturbing would it be to see these women who are coming in, victims of family violence that this government says they understand – but they have just cut \$29 million out of the family violence budget as well – and having to hand them a tent or a swag? Just disgraceful.

Now I will talk about the fire services levy that also will come in people’s rates notices. It will be hidden from people that it is coming from the state government but be absolutely clear – that is what is actually causing the fire services levy rate to go up on your rates bill and your waste management charge. So here we have a government that has put up the fire services levy, significantly hiking up the budget but delaying 83 per cent of existing CFA capital projects – delaying that 83 per cent – so that 28 of the 48 critical new heavy tankers that were originally promised in 2021 have not been delivered. So this is a government that says, ‘But we need more money because we need to pay the fire services,’ the United Firefighters Union members who are in the FRV in Melbourne. No wonder I am hearing from farmers angry as all hell that they as volunteer firefighters will see their farm fire service levy go up by thousands of dollars in many cases to go towards United Firefighters Union demands for higher pay while the CFA members and volunteers struggle to replace their ageing trucks and dilapidated stations. Last year the UFU rejected an offer of a 3 per cent pay rise each year for the next four years plus a \$7359 sign-on bonus plus another \$2021 annually for four years. Mr Marshall actually even demanded his UFU members get free public transport passes. Seriously, they want wholly funded health insurance plus hikes in allowances on top of overtime. Where does it end, and where is the fairness? But those are just the two taxes in this bill that take it up to 55 new taxes.

What about the ‘helping families’ comment that the Treasurer launched the budget with? What about the \$400 payment that is not going to families, it is going to schools, and schools, particularly in my electorate, the Catholic schools, are telling me it is deeply unfair. That is a quote from one of the principals locally. We believe the payment should be means-tested for all students and apply to all students. It should not be based on what school you attend. This policy punishes families for choosing to send their children to a Catholic school. That is what the community think of this very unfair \$400

payment. And how is the school supposed to administer that? Put a little bit of thought into how that is going to work. It does not make a lot of sense.

We have got \$21.5 billion in taxes, which is crippling that property sector. Those taxes are \$7.8 billion in land tax, \$10 billion in land transfer duties, \$1.4 billion in COVID debt levy on landholdings, \$1 billion in the fire services property levy, \$127 million in the congestion levy, \$221 million in the metropolitan improvement levy, \$125 million – it just goes on and on and gets bigger and bigger. At the same time, what are we seeing? Cuts in IVF, public IVF. How do the members for Yan Yean and Narre Warren North look their constituents in the eye and say, ‘We stood up here two years ago and promised public IVF for those families to give them hope that they could have a child.’ Now less than two years later, cut. Cuts to dental – there is a two-year waiting list in my electorate to see a dentist. Why would you cut dental? Cuts to family violence – well, all day we have been hearing how this government, the Labor state government, care about women and care about changes to improve the outcomes for people who are victims of family violence, but they have just cut \$29 million from family violence services. Cuts to cancer research – I mean, how low can you go? A 70 per cent cut to cancer research and at the same time funding a \$4.1 million scoreboard at a football ground. This government is buying love, and it is a disgraceful show of disgraceful principles that do not even warrant the word ‘principle’ – cuts to mental health when our children and many in our community are in trouble and really needing it, cuts to youth justice, cuts to child protection. This is a government who cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price for the mismanagement and the cost blowouts. It is time this government realise how badly they have done and apologise to Victorian communities and their families, because nobody is fooled; in fact the families are hurting.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:45): I am happy to speak today in support of the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. This legislation enacts a number of tax-related policies that have been done as part of the 2024–25 state budget, and I would like to thank and congratulate the Treasurer for the effort and the work that has gone into the budget and this bill.

There are a number of big changes that are part of this bill, and I will talk about a few of them tonight. This legislation amends the Land Tax Act 2005 to provide standalone exemptions from land tax for land used for or available for use for social or emergency housing. This change will provide further certainty to the sector, provide a broader range of social and emergency housing with a land tax exemption and encourage innovation in service delivery, with the assurance that social and emergency housing that satisfies these parameters will receive a land tax exemption.

Land will be eligible for the social housing exemption if the commissioner of state revenue determines that it is used exclusively as social housing that is occupied by a person from the Victorian Housing Register who is allocated a tenancy in the social housing because they meet the eligibility criteria for social housing. Land owned by a charitable institution that the commissioner determines is vacant and declared by their owner to be held for future use as social housing will also be exempt for two years or a longer period approved by the commissioner.

One of the main issues that my office tackles is people in very unfortunate personal circumstances, spanning anything from domestic violence to homelessness or substance use, who are seeking support from the social housing system. This legislation helps put a roof over those people’s heads by incentivising the provision of more social housing. We know that putting a roof over people’s heads helps support them in other areas of their life, whether it be in terms of getting employment, escaping domestic violence or even recovering from a substance use issue. This change is just one more example of how this Labor government is supporting the provision of housing for all, with our hallmark \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build being Australia’s biggest ever investment in public and community housing.

This government is also committed to protecting and improving Victoria’s environment. Our current waste levy is out of step with our neighbouring states and does not reflect the true environmental cost of dumping rubbish in landfill, so we are looking to harmonise our rates with New South Wales and

South Australia's rates. We want less waste dumped at landfill. Changes to the waste levy are about changing behaviour so that big waste producers create less waste and do more to reduce, reuse and recycle. As a former mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong and a former councillor, I know that waste is a big issue to tackle for our communities. We hear about dumped rubbish quite regularly, and anything we can do to incentivise people to reduce waste in landfill will be an added bonus. These levies will encourage investment in resource recovery infrastructure and disincentivise waste going into landfill. If we do not make any changes, it could encourage big waste producers across the border to send their waste to Victorian landfills. One hundred per cent of waste levy revenue goes towards creating a cleaner, greener Victoria. The revenue raised from the waste levy first goes to fund Environment Protection Authority Victoria, Sustainability Victoria and Recycling Victoria, with the remainder added to the Sustainability Fund to be used for programs supporting climate change action and waste reduction.

I know there are many speakers that want to talk on this particular bill, so I will make my comments short, just to share the love, as I know my colleagues would like to talk about how great this bill is. In summary, the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 represents a comprehensive strategy to address pressing societal and environmental challenges, and I am incredibly proud to stand here today and support this legislation wholeheartedly. I commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:50): I thank the member for Mulgrave for going for 5 minutes. I will try and do the same so we can pass the baton around the chamber. I stand up to talk on the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 today. We are here talking about tax, and when I speak to people in the electorate of Morwell, in the Latrobe Valley, one of the big issues that they have is making ends meet in day-to-day living. One of the things that they are talking about is the ongoing taxes that they say, in their words, they are being 'slugged with by the government'. I know that we need to raise taxes to pay for the infrastructure that we need, but when we are, from a regional point of view, spending those taxes on an obsession with a Big Build in Melbourne and our regions are missing out, it is always good to be able to stand up to fly the flag for regional Victoria.

I know the waste management levy, which a few people have touched on here today, is a concern. I know it is going to be a concern with ratepayers. Our councils, because it is going to come out in the council rates, are going to be the ones that cop the brunt of the abuse from the ratepayers as they try and work out how they can fit these extra costs into their cost of living while being able to make sure they have a roof over their family home and are able to put food on the table. You do not have to drive around far in the Latrobe Valley, off track into the bush, to find that people are already dumping rubbish out of the back of their utes or out of their trailers. Like every other member that has stood up here, I do not get why they do it. It is an impost on the community. We want to be able to use our natural resources, to go for bushwalks or to bike ride through our state parks and forests, and to come across tracks which are blocked because people are choosing not to go and pay money at landfill places and not to do the right thing is just going to be a little bit more of an impost on local governments. I can see that being a real concern with the waste management levy.

The other one is the fire services levy. In regional Victoria, especially down in the Latrobe Valley, we are always speaking to our CFA members, and the one thing that most of them want are new facilities – new fire sheds so that they can continue the growth of the CFA to try to entice members to, at the end of the day, look after us in times of crisis and in times of need. A lot of the CFA sheds, as has been spoken about, are hubs of communities. If we are paying a fire levy, we want the money to go to these facilities so we can grow them and expand them. They need new equipment, they need new fire trucks to make sure they are providing a facility and a service to the community, because that is what they want to do. At the end of the day, they want to look after us. We talk about these taxes, and I note there have been 53, soon to be 55, new taxes brought on board by the government. People are feeling it, because it is the people who have to pay these extra taxes. In the conscious of our side of the chamber over here we know that we do have to have taxes, but there are so many taxes and so many new taxes that are hurting small business, hurting our health services and hurting our roads.

Housing, as we have also spoken about, has extra taxes. We want to get people off the streets. We are wanting to give those people that are experiencing violence in the home somewhere to go. As I think the member for Mildura said before, I have had conversations with real estate agents that were telling me that there is a big upturn in mums and dads that are going forward and selling the rental properties that they have rented for a long time to residents. They are not using it for overnight stays. They have long-term residents that are in there. They are actually putting them on the market now because of all these extra costs that are coming through (1) because of the budget and (2) because of extra taxes. So that is what is happening down in the Latrobe Valley, and I think it is right across the state, whether you are in a region or in metro. People are feeling the cost of this budget, the 10th budget of the Allan government, and things are tough on the street. I hope in time that we can actually alleviate the issues and make the cost-of-living crisis that is real and going on with most families in Victoria a little bit better as we move through.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (16:56): I will just start by thanking the member for Morwell for giving me a little bit of a go this afternoon and the member for Mulgrave as well; I appreciate that. It is great to rise on this State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024. There are a couple of things I want to say. In regard to the vacant residential land tax changes, which I think the member for Kew mentioned as well, I think this is a good change. There are people in our state who have their holiday homes that are in a trust account, they might have been part of an estate or otherwise, or they have their holiday homes in a company that they may own, which then has supported their business. People can sometimes leverage assets in a company or a trust. They have loans in business, and so I think that this is a wise change to have a date on when that comes in. I think it will assist those people and their situations. I know Noel, who is a tax accountant/lawyer down my way, thinks that is probably a good idea.

The other thing I want to talk about quickly, which is obviously part of our state tax revenue – one of our few levers if you like – is stamp duty. Stamp duty has a pretty bad rap. Nobody likes stamp duty. It is regressive, punitive or whatever words you want to use. But I just want to have a think about very quickly what New South Wales are going through and what they brought in a couple of years ago. It is similar to what we are doing in the commercial aspect, where we are changing from a stamp duty to a property tax. I have no problems with the fact of doing it in the commercial aspect, but I do have hesitancy in bringing that to residential housing. I know that the economist boffins around the world think that that is a much better idea.

I did a few numbers, so bear with me on the numbers, but let us say you have got a property with a sale price of about \$800,000, average price, and a land price of let us call it half a million. Stamp duty in Victoria right now on that would be around \$43,000. That is a lot of money, especially if you are a first home buyer. You cannot borrow that money. It is a lot of money. But if you go to the New South Wales model and if you opt in, instead of paying that \$43,000, you pay \$2000 every year. But obviously that will go up in time. So I did a bit of a ‘pull a number out of the air’ and wondered what if you were paying 2.5 per cent on average at CPI or whatever. Well, your \$43,000 in today’s money will become \$2000, \$2100, \$2200, \$2300, \$2500. Let us say you were 35 when you bought this property. By the time you are 50, you have paid \$41,000 in the replacement of stamp duty. If you keep going another 15 years, by the time you are 65 you have paid \$98,000. You then retire. You then do not have income except for your super, and yet you still have to come up with, in that day’s money, \$4500, and it keeps going up. So I think New South Wales are walking into a problem with pensioners in about 20-odd years time.

I would counsel any economists and those treasury boffins around the country who are listening to think about this. Should they ever be arguing it, whether it be a policy from whoever, I would argue you need to put a caveat on this, you need to put a timeline on this. If you want a HECS system or something, sure, as long as there is some final day. Otherwise, you are essentially forcing pensioners to sell their houses in order to downsize and keep money to pay for their life. So from my point of view this state tax bill is a good bill; what New South Wales are doing is a bad bill.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of the remaining items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (17:09): (661) It gives me no joy to raise this matter to the Premier today. We have seen antisemitism at a record high since the events of 7 October, and it is ground zero on our university campuses at the moment. The action that I seek is for the Premier to intervene and shut down these encampments. We have seen students have to put up with far too much. Right as we speak we have hundreds of protesters and extreme activists locking themselves in at Melbourne University campus to say, 'No-one is in, this is our campus.' The same has happened on our streets in Melbourne. The same happens outside the front of Parliament. I believe tonight hundreds of these extremists, these anti-Jewish protesters, are outside the steps of Parliament doing exactly the same – saying that they own the streets. They do not own the streets. They do not own our university campuses. They do not own the front steps of Parliament. The people of Victoria own this place, and we should not be pushed out. We should not be in a position where we are walking around in fear.

Enough is absolutely enough. These encampments must be broken up. We had the Chief Commissioner of Police on ABC radio only a few days ago saying the earlier we shut down these encampments, the safer it will be for everybody. The longer it goes, the more it grows, and everybody is fearful of this getting completely out of hand. I note that at ANU and at Deakin University both of those encampments have been shut down, and I credit the vice-chancellors at both universities for taking action. But many of these universities do not know what to do. They are waiting for leadership. They are ultimately waiting for the direction to come in and break up these encampments. It is ground zero for these universities. Free speech should be something that we all embrace, but not hate speech. Hate speech crosses the line, and these students should be able to go to university campuses and not have to do their studies online and have to deal with people doing the Heil Hitler salute – these extremist activists.

Only a few days ago at Monash University, when we had a remembrance service for fallen soldiers, just like on Anzac Day, we had extremists on the university campus. The only way for the Jewish community to attend that event was having the protection of hundreds of Victorian police, who were there to keep us safe. No-one, absolutely no-one, should have to deal with this. Enough is enough. We need to break this up. We need to start to embrace tolerance and respect for all – for everybody – including the Jewish community, who has had enough. We are fed up with this, and enough is absolutely enough.

Container deposit scheme

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:12): (662) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and I ask that he visits the electorate of Northcote to see our new container deposit scheme reverse vending machine in action. This very morning the crane arrived at 6:30 am into Preston South to install the high-tech automated refund point for Victoria's container deposit scheme. Near the corner of St Georges Road and Bell Street, behind the arts centre and Ray Bramham Gardens, our new CDS machine will take recycling to the next level in the inner north. Residents will be able to collect cans, cartons and glass and plastic bottles and bring them here, where they can insert them into

the chute at the front of the machine. The containers will be automatically scanned to make sure they are eligible for a refund and stored in the back end of the snazzy-looking shipping container, ready for collection by Visy, our network operator in the north. When you finish depositing the containers, the reverse vending machine will issue the refund of 10 cents per item. What is more, people will have a choice in how they receive their refund. They can opt for a cash voucher or an electronic payment into their bank account, or they can choose to donate their refund to a charity, school, sports club or community organisation in the area through the interface on the machine. This is a wonderful opportunity for our community to take part in the circular economy, reduce waste, pocket some extra cash and support one another through donations. I know that local organisations like Friends of Darebin Creek, Northcote Primary, Thornbury kinder and Northcote City soccer club have already signed up.

Speaker, as you know, the inner north is already at the forefront of our collective environmental efforts, and as the member for Northcote, I have been proud to champion important initiatives, like our neighbourhood battery in Alphington, building new homes gas-free, restoring our creeks and of course the rollout of the CDS. With drink containers making up almost half of Victoria's litter, the CDS is a key part of our work in sustainability, and I am immensely pleased to see it made more accessible through this local reverse vending machine. The CDS has of course already been a huge success, with over 400 million containers already returned statewide and over 8 million returned in Darebin alone. It builds on our Labor government's commitment to a circular economy and our ambitious target of diverting 80 per cent of waste from landfill by 2030. We all have a role to play in meeting this target, and I know that Northcote is well and truly up for that challenge. I thank Visy for operating this refund point, and I encourage northside residents to give it a go and realise those environmental and financial benefits for our community. I am looking forward to welcoming the minister to our special part of the world.

Western Victoria fires

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (17:15): (663) My adjournment matter is to the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to provide funding for the following priority projects to assist Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge to recover following the devastating bushfires back in February. The Premier came to the region following the bushfires, and so I know that she had seen firsthand the extent of the devastation through those two areas, particularly through the Pomonal community, which lost so many homes and of course the homes, importantly, of CFA volunteer firefighters.

Since the budget was handed down my office has been inundated with people who are suggesting important projects that could be funded as part of the disaster relief and recovery program. I would like to acknowledge a number of people who have worked really hard to push and collect this wish list together, and then I will run through the program. I would like to thank Colin Macaffer, Russ Kellett, Jill Miller and Tim Harrison, who is the CEO of Ararat Rural City Council. They have all done an incredible job in leading their community through this difficult time amongst many, many other locals in the Pomonal community. Of course Jacko over in Dadswells Bridge has done a fabulous job in that region as well.

The highest priority items are around supporting our vital CFA. They are requesting a slip-on four-wheel drive firefighting unit for Pomonal CFA, a new fire truck for Pomonal CFA, a second permanent tanker for Stawell fire brigade, land to be purchased in order to build a new station in the future at Stawell and an upgrade to Pomonal Hall. It does not have any double glazing or any fireproofing, and it also needs better storage and an appropriate sound system, including a hearing loop. Unfortunately during community meetings regarding the fires a lot of elderly residents could not hear what was being said. The hall also requires drainage and pathway improvements.

Improved internet and phone connectivity is needed throughout the entire Grampians region, as is more money for clean-up to help people get back on track with rebuilds. Another \$50,000 to \$100,000 is needed for the Pomonal resilience committee for their voucher program to support people who lost

housing. They need various housing options, particularly smaller units for ageing residents, and also new surfacing and lighting for the two tennis courts, new tennis clubrooms and the establishment of a walking track around the existing oval. Pomonal Talks need some funding – \$2000 a year to keep the initiative going. Bike and walking tracks from Pomonal Estate into the township, past Nadia's lovely little store and into Halls Gap, are needed. They need money for youth services – they want to start a boxing class there – and grant support for Pomonal Cottages and other businesses impacted by the fire, whether they were fully destroyed or suffered loss of trade. There still has not been any funding provided for businesses or for primary producers, which has been offered in previous funding. There is also a range of other things like a tool library, Pomonal market and so many other initiatives. I ask –
(Time expired)

Holmesglen youth foyer

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (17:18): (664) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at the Holmesglen youth foyer in my electorate to meet with the inspiring young Victorians who benefit from this program. I am so thrilled because in the 2024–25 state budget the Allan Labor government is proud to be investing \$1.83 million in the Holmesglen youth foyer, which is run in collaboration with Launch Housing and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It was great back in December to attend the 10th anniversary of this wonderful collaboration between these great organisations. The program provides purpose-built accommodation to young Victorians with lived experience of homelessness. Not only that, it is also co-located with Holmesglen TAFE and combined with wraparound academic and mental health supports. It is about giving vulnerable young Victorians the best start in life with world-class TAFE courses, quality housing and the support they need to make their career and personal aspirations become reality. Words really cannot express just how life-changing the Holmesglen youth foyer is.

As a Labor government we have a fundamental belief in the difference government can make as an agent for positive change. I am so glad for the sake of the vulnerable people across my district that Labor are in government in this state, because we are making meaningful improvements to the lives of Victorians. Funding for the Holmesglen youth foyer is a case in point. It is giving vulnerable young people the best start in life.

With this Friday being IDAHOBIT, I would also like to briefly acknowledge the Holmesglen youth foyer's focus on supporting LGBTIQ+ young people. In Victoria equality is not negotiable, nor is the right for Victorians to lead their lives with dignity and stability. I am so proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government that is making it a reality and investing in the Glen Waverley community, not just in the Holmesglen youth foyer but also in our major local social housing builds. Dozens and dozens of new social housing homes are being constructed across my community. The housing minister and I recently met with some of my new constituents, and there were tears of joy when they talked about the positive impact our investments into social housing have made. Whether it is funding the Holmesglen youth foyer or the Big Housing Build homes in Whitehorse and Monash, I commend the housing minister for her work, and I look forward to her response.

Eildon electorate health services

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:20): (665) I have an urgent and critical matter for the Minister for Health, and I trust that since she is in the chamber I have her undivided attention. The action I seek is for the minister to ensure the hospitals in Mansfield, Alexandra and Yea are not subject to amalgamation and instead are funded appropriately to continue operations at current levels. It makes no sense to have these services run out of Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton. Shepparton is an hour and a half away from each of these communities and has very few community links. By stealth the government embarked on a process to merge hospitals. Communities have been left completely in the dark as to the government's intent. Nothing was put in writing. CEOs and board chairs were gagged to keep communities in the dark. To quote JFK:

The very word 'secrecy' is repugnant in a free and open society ...

Hospital CEOs received a phone call alerting them to the required 10 per cent savings – that is code for budget cuts. Reports indicate that these changes are designed to deliver savings to help reduce the ever-increasing and spiralling debt crisis created by the Victorian government. Gone are the words ‘partnerships’ and ‘consolidation’. It is only consolidation now, and hospital mergers are very much on the table. This is devastating for my communities. The plan will see a loss of healthcare sector jobs, a loss of local services, a disruption to continuity in patient care in aged care, a huge threat to theatre and maternity, particularly in Mansfield, and primary health care. There is disruption to our traditional and longstanding emergency education and clinical governance and visiting specialist links out of Mansfield and Alexandra. The health services are among the biggest local employers, and people are passionate about their hospitals. The amalgamation plan is said to be supported by data, but that data does not appear to exist. These hospitals were not visited by the plan’s expert panel.

We know from Grampians Health that health services in the west of the state have seen local GPs leave as it is no longer such an attractive proposition to be working in those areas. Hospitals have increased costs imposed by the government without increased funding to cover these costs. They have increased costs in medicines, needles and masks. WorkCover has rocketed. Safe patient care – the enterprise bargaining agreement has gone up 3 per cent each year, as has superannuation. And hospitals have not been given any more funding to cover these costs. Too many hospitals have been forced to carry deficits; it is carry deficits or cut services. Under Labor at least a dozen of Victoria’s health services are operating with significant deficits, with reports from health insiders suggesting that the Royal Melbourne Hospital is also one of the ones that is millions of dollars in the red. Labor cannot manage money. They cannot manage our health system, and as a result Victorian patients will suffer. It is just not good enough. These hospitals cannot be run out of Shepparton.

Pinewood Primary School

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (17:23): (666) My adjournment question this evening is for the Deputy Premier in his capacity as the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for him to join me at the fantastic Pinewood Primary School down our way to have a look at the plans that the wonderful school captains Tian Tian Han, Samuel Zuo, Chloe Vo and Lawrence Wei, along with Karen Jenkins, our fantastic principal, showed me the other week. I was delighted to call Karen just last week and let her know that the commitment that we made leading up to the 2022 election to provide and fund and build a new gym for that school is now fully funded. I reckon the minister and I should go and have a chat to them, because apparently they have a 3D video walk-through of how fantastic this gym is going to be. This is a school that over the last 12 years has grown from around 320 students to 990. That is amazing growth in our area. The school does fantastic work. But let us face it, the hall that they had from the last upgrades – which, to his credit, good old Michael Gidley did before we turned up – is not fit for purpose anymore. We made a promise, and we have fully delivered that promise. Now we have just got to get on and build it, which we will do.

Solar for Apartments program

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:25): (667) My adjournment is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action, and the action I seek is for the minister to fix the Solar for Apartments program so that residents of apartment buildings wanting to have solar installed through this new program are not having their applications effectively blocked by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The Victorian government’s Solar Homes program has been very successful for owner-occupiers of detached homes. However, where the program has to date failed is for residents of apartments and for renters, who either have not been able to access a government solar program or have found the application process onerous.

The Solar for Apartments program that started this year is a good thing, but in the last week alone I have been contacted by two separate Brunswick apartment residents who were dumbfounded to learn that they will not be able to apply because their block contains apartments owned by the government and managed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Applications for the program

have to be approved by owners corporations, where such approval is dependent on a majority or unanimous support of residents in a ballot. The issue arises because the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing does not respond to owners corporation ballots, either meaning unanimous decisions cannot be carried or potentially making majority decisions more unlikely. Even if a building has successfully applied by the owners corporation reaching a majority decision, it is concerning that DFFH will not support their own tenants in participating in the program and benefiting from cheaper, cleaner energy. On the Solar for Apartments website it states:

We strongly urge OCs and strata management companies to engage all residents, including owner-occupiers and renters to encourage participation in the program.

I call on the minister to strongly urge the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to participate in the program, or at least make sure they are not standing in the way of the apartment residents who want to participate.

Willum Warrain

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (17:27): (668) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to come down to my electorate to visit the amazing space that is Willum Warrain. I have spoken about Willum Warrain several times since I came to this place in members statements and adjournments. It really is a very special and spiritual place to me and to the many locals that attend the various activities held every week throughout the year. Willum Warrain in local Boon Wurrung language means 'home by the sea'. It is a gathering place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders come together to explore their goals, ideas and identity. It was established in 2014 in Hastings with support from Mornington Peninsula shire and funding from the Closing the Gap program.

Over the last four years Willum Warrain has established the only Aboriginal community owned and run bush nursery, specialising in local indigenous plants from the Mornington Peninsula. They are the only Aboriginal-run retail and wholesale nursery south of Melbourne open to the public. They also work with local communities, businesses and schools in helping to build gardens using indigenous plants, and in doing so share the cultural knowledge of each plant and also each plant's unique dream. The work that they do around healing country is really amazing, and I look forward to showing the minister this work and talking about other ways of how Willum Warrain can extend the healing of country in my electorate.

Euroa electorate health services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:28): (669) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the government abandon its attempts to force the amalgamation of regional hospitals. Labor is starving health services of funding, resulting in cuts to services, job losses and forced mergers across the state. This government has made it clear there will be no further funding provided to our hospitals beyond what was committed in the budget. This budget cut \$207 million from public health on top of millions cut from dental services, aged care, ambulance services, health workforce training and maternal and child health. While these cuts are set to impact all 76 of Victoria's health services, the impact will be most acutely felt in regional and rural communities.

Cuts are coming at a time when our healthcare providers can least afford it, with significant delay to ambulance response times, out-of-control GP and surgery waitlists, exorbitant health taxes and a general lack of resourcing. Health services have indicated their current funding level is just enough to cover wages and basic expenses such as food and medicines, but they are unable to plan to replace equipment that has reached the end of its life or to recruit more staff. One senior health official recently said on the record that it felt like the health services were being suffocated until amalgamation is the only option. A local hospital executive told me that it might not technically be forced amalgamations, but it is certainly death by 1000 cuts to regional health services due to inadequate government enterprise bargaining agreement funding.

These mergers are deeply concerning for rural and regional health services and for our communities. We have hospitals like Benalla, which is currently operating at a minor operating loss of under \$2 million, while a larger hospital like Goulburn Valley is operating at more than 10 times higher losses. These mergers are punishing local health services that by all accounts are running better than the state's major health providers. With these mergers comes the threat of regional patients being forced to travel long distances for basic services and the loss of local jobs from our communities.

Keeping regional health services in our communities should be the priority, not cutting them. These hospitals are a sense of pride for our communities and a major employer, and they ensure that locals can get quality treatment close to home. The minister herself said this week she wants to ensure regional Victorians are receiving the care they need as close to home as possible, and she acknowledged that regional communities are less well off than their metro Melbourne counterparts when it comes to their health care. Unfortunately all we are seeing is more cuts and mergers that prove this is all talk and the minister does not have regional Victoria's health at heart. Labor cannot manage money, and our patients are paying the ultimate price.

Thomastown electorate sporting and recreation facilities

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (17:31): (670) I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek from him is to visit with me the site of a new dog park in the growing suburb of Wollert. The dog park is one of several local commitments our Victorian Labor government made at the last election. Recreational spaces are very important to residents living in new suburbs such as Wollert and North Epping. In fact right now we are involved in a campaign urging the City of Whittlesea to urgently develop land designated for recreational activities. There is a dire lack of sport and recreational facilities in the north of the Thomastown electorate. The only basketball and netball courts in the area are those the state government has built at schools. Residents are crying out for ovals to kick or hit a ball, run around with kids or let their dogs off leash, not to mention all the registered cricket, soccer, AFL and rugby league clubs that are looking for a place to call home. It is very pleasing to see the state government contribution start the ball rolling with the off-leash dog park to support the many households with dogs. The City of Whittlesea needs to step up and take on their responsibility to build the ovals, courts and pavilions that residents desperately need.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:32): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the questions that were raised by the member for Eildon and the member for Euroa. Speaker, I will seek your guidance if I can, because they are substantially similar questions, on whether I could attempt to answer them together.

The SPEAKER: I believe that would be appropriate for the responses. They were very similar.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Thank you very much. Both members asked about hospital funding and in particular hospital funding in rural and regional Victoria.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Hang on. I have got 30 minutes, right, so just give me a break. One of the first questions was about hospital funding. I am really, really pleased that this year's budget has delivered \$8.8 billion in additional funding to our hospital services, and what is really important is that \$1.5 billion of that is for this operating year, for this financial year. My department is working now with each of our health services as we come to financial close to support those health services in everything that they have done through this very challenging time to continue to meet the healthcare needs of Victorians wherever they live. I must say in making this commitment, this significant boost, one of the biggest ever, that this is something that has been welcomed by our health services because

it directly responds to what they have asked of us. It is about meeting some of the needs that go with the increased costs that we have seen in our healthcare system.

While I am talking about costs, let me point to some of the challenges that our healthcare system is facing right across the state.

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Speaker, again, I have been asked some serious questions. I am trying to give a serious answer, and I request the respect of the –

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members to cease interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I was talking about increased cost expenditure in our healthcare system, and I am certainly well aware of this because I have been travelling right around our state visiting hospitals in the member for Lowan's electorate, in the member for Euroa's electorate, in the member for Eildon's electorate, and I have had a great opportunity to hear firsthand some of the concerns that have been expressed by those health services and in particular healthcare workers.

So let me tell you about some of the challenges that are now being faced, not just by our health system I might say, but indeed by health systems right around the world. One of those is the changes in our care needs and our population. Our population is growing and we are getting older. This means that we are living with more chronic conditions and we are living with more comorbidities. What this in turn means is that we are seeing greater investment in or greater focus on –

Emma Kealy interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Do you want a serious answer or not? I am talking about the challenges that are being experienced by hospitals in rural and regional Victoria, and I will have it noted that I have had constant interjections from the member for Lowan while I have been trying to address this very serious issue.

It is about changes that we have seen in our population and the healthcare needs of our community, and changes in the way in which care is being delivered. The second challenge that we have faced has been workforce challenges, and again these are most acutely felt in rural and regional Victoria. I know this because I represent a regional electorate myself. I know this because I have friends and family that live in very rural parts of the state, and I know the challenges that are being faced. I have been and met with CEOs at hospitals like Portland, Orbost and Bairnsdale, and I have been at Robinvale and Mildura, and I have met and heard firsthand about these concerns.

The third point that I want to address is the rise in costs that we have seen. Because of this workforce shortage, labour costs have been rising. But you know what else has been rising? Our health services are competing against one another for these scarce resources, and they are driving costs up. The consequence of this is the people that miss out are the people in rural and regional Victoria. I am passionate about improving the care and the health outcomes of people in rural and regional Victoria. It is why I have asked an expert advisory committee to inquire as to whether or not the way in which our health system is currently organised is fit for purpose, now and into the future. This committee has been out and has met with CEOs, with health board chairs and health boards more generally. They have now provided some advice to my department, and in turn I await that advice from my department.

But let me be clear: under our government there will be no hospital closures. That is what those on the other side of the chamber do. If you look at their record, the Liberal –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the two adjournment matters this evening were both around the action to seek that the minister abandon plans to amalgamate health services in their respective electorates. To this point in time, and we are now 6½ minutes into the response, we have not heard from the minister how she will action that item. There has been a rambling approach, and I

realise the minister has got a wideranging ability to respond to these adjournment matters. However, she has not responded to the specific matter of asking her to abandon plans for health mergers.

The SPEAKER: In an adjournment debate, the minister can answer the query raised on the adjournment in any way the minister sees fit.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Given the challenges that our health system has faced and given the impact that the one-in-100-year pandemic has had on our health system and on the health and wellbeing of our community, then it would be negligent not to inquire as to whether the way our system is organised is fit for now and into the future. So that work will continue. Again, I will make it clear: this government will not close hospitals. It is not what we do. Those on the other side, the Liberal Party, when they were in government closed 10 regional hospitals.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the adjournment is not a time to attack the opposition. I would also ask, on a point of order – I can do a separate point of order, if you like, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Is this a separate point of order?

Emma Kealy: Yes. I assume you are not going to rule in my favour, but I have got a second point of order.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the member for Lowan not to reflect on the Chair. I will rule on that point of order based on previous rulings from the Chair. The minister has a great breadth in responding to matters raised during the adjournment debate, far more so than a minister would have during question time. The minister is answering the question as the minister sees fit.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I said, it was the Kennett government that closed 10 hospitals in rural and regional Victoria. It was a Liberal government that sold off the Latrobe Regional Hospital. It was a Liberal government that sold off the Mildura hospital. It was a Labor government that brought the Latrobe hospital back into public hands. It was a Labor government that brought the Mildura hospital back into public hands. It was a Labor government that saved the Euroa bush nursing hospital, and we brought that into the public health system. We purchased two private hospitals to bring them into the public system, and we were criticised by those on the other side when we did that.

Again, the long-term challenges of our health system are things that I take very, very seriously. I am absolutely committed to the delivery of more and better care for the people of rural and regional Victoria as close to home as possible and as soon as possible. Let me tell you this: when I have been out visiting hospitals – I am not going to name them here, but there are a number of small rural hospitals – I have been to a hospital that had one patient and I have been to a hospital that had three patients. And let me tell you this: what would happen if those on the other side were in power is that they would close them. But do you know what I want to see? I want to see patients back close to home. I want to see the hospitals and those nurses, with the great care that they can deliver, treating more people closer to home. That will be what motivates and drives me in any of the decisions that I make. Thank you so much, Speaker, for that time.

The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action that he seeks is that the Premier intervene in universities in relation to protests taking place on campuses. The member for Northcote raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister joins her to see the container deposit scheme reverse vending machine in action. The member for Lowan raised a matter for the attention of the Premier in relation to priority projects in bushfire-impacted communities in her electorate. The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing, and the action that he sought is that the minister joins him to visit Holmesglen youth foyer, which I am sure is something she would very much look forward to doing, particularly given the funding that it has received in the Allan Labor government's 2024–25 budget.

ADJOURNMENT

1810

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday 15 May 2024

The member for Ashwood raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action that he sought is that the minister joins him to visit Pinewood Primary School. The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Climate Action, and the action that he sought is that the minister inquires and takes action in relation to making solar more available in apartments where the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is in fact a landlord. He raised a number of complex issues, which I am sure the minister will look into. The member for Hastings raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action that he seeks is that the minister join him to visit Willum Warrain, which in local Boon Wurrung language means 'home by the sea'. I am sure the minister would be delighted to join you there, member for Hastings. The member for Thomastown raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and again she seeks that the minister join her at the new dog park in Wollert, which I know will be something that is very welcomed by the people of Thomastown.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Thank you to the clerks and attendants. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:46 pm.